

AMBUSH



*“‘And you, Joan, you knew——’ he began.
‘Only the—the—truth, Paul,’ Joan cried.”*

AMBUSH

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A CHANGE OF COURIERS	3
II.	GRANDE PORTAGE	17
III.	AN INTERRUPTED BANQUET	33
IV.	AMBUSCADE	48
V.	THE ILIAD OF THE FOREST	64
VI.	THE DEAD ARISE	83
VII.	TRADE WAR	95
VIII.	THE PRICE OF A KISS	114
IX.	MUTINY	133
X.	THE RED DEATH	152
XI.	OOCHEMEGOU KESIGOW	173
XII.	THE SORCERY OF SPRING	193
XIII.	A SKIN FOR A SKIN	212
XIV.	IN THE TEMPLE OF THE WILD	231

AMBUSH

CHAPTER ONE

A CHANGE OF COURIERS

THE blood-red, five-pointed stars emblazoned on the warm yellow bows of the seven birch-bark canoes which skirted Lake Superior's north shore advertised the fleet as a Hudson's Bay Company brigade. The predominancy of James Bay Crees among the crews told that the brigade was fresh from one of the bay posts—in all probability Moose Factory, and that the route of travel had been up the Moose and Missinabie rivers, across the Height of Land, and down the Michipicoten to the broad and restless bosom of Superior itself.

Also, the magnificence of the leading canoe and the elaborate costumes of its occupants proclaimed it a Factor's craft. A splendid six-fathom canoe, moulded, sewn, and gummed by master aborigine hands, it glided lightly as foam under the urge of half-a-dozen Indian paddlers: bowsman, steersman, two middlemen paired forward, two paired aft.

In the bow fluttered the crimson flag of the Ancient and Honourable Company. From the stern streamed a long gonfalon of the same shade, crisping and crackling in the wind and slapping its pennant-like tip with a resounding smack upon the passing wave crests.

From the paddle shafts blew streamers of gaudy wool, and these flying gleams of colour mingled with the glint of bright-beaded moc-casins, red and blue leggings, flaming belts and scarves, brilliant fillets bound about the black-haired heads carrying still more brilliant feathers, long, graceful plumes dyed in violent colours, which slanted back on the wearers' shoulders and marked them as trusted canoemen of a Factor.

The Factor himself, a young man compared to the aging priest who shared his place amidships, half sat, half reclined upon a rich robe of snow-white ermine skin. The priest was dressed sombrely, cowed and cassocked in black after the fashion of Jesuit missionaries, with canvas gauntlets upon his hands and a mosquito veil covering his face, but rich as the robe they both reclined upon was the young man's every garment, fastidious, distinctive, elegant, at once suiting a personality of superior tastes and fitting his rank as an overlord of the mighty company.

Upon abnormally heavy shoulders he wore a blanket-cloth coat of a rare fawn colour.

Across his wide chest the coat was thrown open to the sweeping lake breeze, and, underneath, a low-collared shirt of fine flannel, also unbuttoned, fluttered and crinkled and bellied, revealing his huge deltoids and the great muscled ridges extending from neck to shoulder. His lower limbs were clothed in short trousers of creamy deer-skin tanned soft and pliable as chamois and meeting summer moccasins of the same material, high-cut above the calf-like winter shoe-packs.

A massive frame he possessed, and possessed it proudly. Rugged like the neck was the head that rose above it; the clean-shaven, well-rounded jaw hollowed above the chin; the mouth full and firm, nose straight and spaciouly nostrilled for the big lungs; cheek-bones high and well-fleshed, hollowing the face again in front of the small, close-set ears.

Hair short-cropped and clean of scalp, his head was covered with a cap of soft amber leather, the visor peak of which shaded his gray eyes from the sun. Calm, self-reliant, determined, yet with the flash of the youthful spirit in them tempered by a wealth of experience, the eyes looked ahead over Superior's rollers toward the rock-ramparted, spruce-sentinelled shore, and his voice when he spoke belied nothing of the masterfulness of his frame, his face, or his eye.

It was a deep voice, strong and resonant, thrilling with a peculiar timbre which betrayed the fact that he was accustomed to read aloud from books or perhaps make oration to gatherings of traders and tribes. It was the voice of one in authority, one who supremely commands, decrees the law.

"Look, Father Andrews," he exulted, extending a powerful brown, mobile hand, "yonder is our island. It hides the bay behind. Eugene Drummond will meet us in Grande Portage to-night, and to-morrow we shall be well on our way to our new district."

"But are you sure your voyageur will not fail you, Carlisle?" hazarded Father Andrews.

"Eugene never fails me," declared Carlisle, with a shake of his head. "Last fall when I got news of my transfer this summer from Moose Factory to Cumberland House and sent him in to spy out the land, I gave him especial warning to be at Grande Portage not later than July the ninth. I told him I would reach there to-day, the ninth, on my way to Cumberland House, and he was under orders to lead the brigade on. No, he will not fail!"

With a swing of his body he twisted his head and nodded to his Ojibway steersman.

"The channel, Missowa!" he directed in the Ojibway dialect.

"Ae, Factor," returned Missowa who was standing up to his work in the high-curved stern. And in a different, guttural tone he added the laconic word—"Canoe!"

"So?" demanded Carlisle, sitting erect to stare under his hand. "Maybe it's the Iroquois Indian who passed without seeing us as we ate dinner down the shore."

"No Iroquois," decided the Ojibway steersman. "No Indian. White man. A man of the French Company."

"A Northwest Fur Company man, eh? Yes, Missowa, yes—I believe you are right."

For now he saw it was indeed the Northwest Fur Company's livery that the approaching paddler wore, a Northwest canoe he paddled out through the molten wash of gold that the westering sun spilled over the high, wooded mainland ridge where the Pigeon River brawled down to Superior.

Like a Northwest voyageur passing out of Grande Portage Bay upon the customary evening fishing excursion the canoeman drifted, his slender paddle stirring the golden wash and gilding itself therein, his glistening yellow craft slanting like a shaft of sunshine from roller crest to roller trough and back again.

But once outside the channel where the tree-crowned island which hid the bay screened him from sight of any one on shore, Carlisle noted a change in his attitude. From the casual pose of a fisherman he suddenly threw himself into the pose of one who runs a race, and paddling viciously, bore like a surf-rider down upon the Factor's craft.

Every time he retrieved his paddle after the plunge he caused it to touch the lake surface with a vicious forward poke which sent the spray spattering like shot against his canoe bow where the letters N. W. were smeared in black pitch. The smear seemed to annoy him, and at every splash the Factor could hear him growl low in his throat.

"*Certainement*," he reiterated, "I change you soon. I change you soon!"

Twenty feet away, and still in mid-career, he whirled his prow with one flick of his paddle on to the nose of a cross-sea, and there he poised spectacularly, balancing with superb skill the while he threw the tasselled cap from his head into the canoe bottom and followed it with the red shirt stripped from his body. Naked to the waist, around which buckskin trousers were

loosely belted, he stood silhouetted against the flaming disk of the sun, his short, squat, powerful body, tanned to a smoky bronze, shining dull-red.

All the time his expressive hands gesticulated. His volatile face, tanned like his body, creased itself in a cunning grin so that the milk-white teeth gleamed, the thin nostrils quivered, the coal-black eyes danced. The grin became a chuckle, and he tossed his head from side to side, streaming his raven hair this way and that in wild disorder on the whistling wind.

"Eh, w'at you t'ink, *camarades*?" he saluted as he stamped upon the discarded shirt.

"Drummond!" ejaculated Carlisle and Misowa in one breath.

"*Oui*," laughed the voyageur, "an' glad to be rid of dat disguise! Once I scrape dat *diable* pitch off ma bows an' paint dem wit' de crimson star, I feel happy again."

Carlisle glanced aside at the priest with a quiet smile of vindication.

"I told you, Father, that Eugene would not fail me," he reminded.

"Aye, Paul," nodded Andrews, "and may all your subjects always be as faithful!"

The Factor turned back to Eugene Drummond.

"But why did you not wait in Grande Portage as I ordered?" he demanded. "Why are you in that disguise, and why have you come down the lake to meet me?"

"De Nor'westaires close Grande Portage,"

announced Drummond, with a dramatic sweep of his arm. "Nobody goes troo—Hudson's Bay men, Free-Traders, nor anybody else."

Something like an imprecation rumbled in Carlisle's throat. A wave of anger suffused and darkened the sun-bronze of his face, and his gray eyes widened, glinting hard.

"They would try that?" he blurted in a voice so heavy that it was almost a bellow. "They would dare?"

"Dey have dared," assured the voyageur. "Dey claim her as Nor'west ground. Ba gar, Factor, dis beeg fight dat t'reatens so long, she's come at last. All troo de Saskatchewan w're you sent me spyin' I be see de signs."

"What about our trade on the Saskatchewan now?"

"It's wan long report, an' I'm have to geeve you de figures ashore, but to spik her brief, I'm find de Nor'westaires be winnin' our trade. *Oui*, and dere's anodder winnin' more dan us or de Nor'westaires."

"A Free-Trader, eh?"

"*Certainement*, wan American frontiersman named Ralph Wayne."

The six-fathom canoe gave a violent lurch. Father Andrews had started suddenly, and even as Carlisle gazed at him in mild surprise the priest viciously smote the palm of his left gauntlet down the back of his right.

"A mosquito under your glove, eh, Father?" the Factor bantered, angry gravity disappearing from his face under the impulse of whimsical

laughter. "It takes more than canvas to stop those whining bloodsuckers."

The priest answered nothing, but while he rubbed his hand Eugene Drummond gazed keenly at him across the twenty-foot water gap. For Andrews had been a mystery to Drummond ever since the first time he had set eyes on him. That was twenty-one years before when the priest had drifted up Lake Huron into Fort Michillimackinac in charge of the nine-year-old boy, Paul Carlisle. The boy's father, so Andrews gave it out, was an English officer, Captain Charles Carlisle of Butler's Rangers, stationed at Niagara, who had been killed in Butler's raid upon the Wyoming Valley and who, being a widower, had left the boy in his charge.

That was all Eugene Drummond knew of the history of either of the two, and the passing of twenty-one years had not increased his knowledge very much. True, he had seen young Paul schooled, given entrance as a clerk into the service of the great company, advanced little by little, transferred for a period to England where he managed the London fur sales and at the same time dipped into the higher learning, and finally made Factor of the important James Bay post of Moose Factory whence he was now moved to be lord of Cumberland House on the Saskatchewan.

Although Andrews was his companion and guardian through it all, and Eugene Drummond was in almost constant contact with them in the Hudson's Bay Company's service, the voyageur had never solved the intangible mystery that he

fancied surrounded the priest. Never in those twenty-one years had Drummond fairly seen the man Andrews, his figure or his face.

Always he looked upon a gown that seemed to him to shroud and to conceal, upon head-gear that was something of a mask. Now, in summer, it was the heavy dun cowl and the thick mosquito veil. In winter it was the dun cowl and a fur-fringed, helmet-like hood on his capote that proved just as impenetrable.

Drummond always imagined that if Andrews but dropped the mask his mystery would dissolve, and the suspended possibility continually fretted and irritated him. *Mon Dieu!* why could not the man be human like the rest of these large-thewed, tangible Northmen? He was tired of watching an elusive ghost flitting about in a black gown. And why *le diable* had Andrews started and lurched the canoe just now?

Was it because of a mosquito bite or was it because he, Eugene, had voiced the name of Ralph Wayne? The voyageur determined to watch and see, but as he went on to speak further of the Free-Trader, his shrewd dark eyes could read nothing, for the priest now sat impassive, still rubbing lightly the thumb of his left gauntlet along the back of his right.

"Dis man Wayne is de great powaire in dat West," elucidated Eugene, "an' he be built wan stronghold Fort Wayne to defend hees district. He be de mightiest of de independents, de leader of dem all, an' he be de enemy, as mooch as de Nor'westaires, dat we have to fight an' absorb."

Carlisle, listening, nodded ponderously, his face clouded, his forehead ridged in a frown, as if he weighed the voyageur's news within himself and found it of heavy portent. His nod was a sign of complete understanding and an intimation for Eugene to go on.

"So as well as to warn you about Grande Portage bein' closed I be come out to tell you of dis man Wayne. He be beeg menace to de Nor'westaires, joost lak us, an' dey're goin' to fight an' absorb heem—queeck."

"How quick?" demanded the Factor.

"Dis night. I sign on wit' de Nor'westaires an' wear deir clothes to get de information, an' I'm come down from de West wit' wan Lake Winnipeg brigade. We pass Wayne dis mornin' on de Pigeon River. He be on hees way to Montreal wit' hees season's furs. He make de Portage dis evenin'. He ain't know she's closed.

"De Nor'westaires tell heem w'en he come in, an' den dey're goin' absorb heem on de spot. An' dat ain't de worst, eider. Hees daughter Joan Wayne be travellin' wit' heem to Montreal an' de Nor'west partners goin' seize her along wit' her father. Wan of de partners has hees eye on her dis long taim, so dey tell me in de post."

"Which partner?" Carlisle's words slipped forth, sharp as slitting steel.

"Richelieu!"

"Then this thing's serious, Eugene," declared the Factor, "and it means that you and I have to get into Grande Portage this afternoon. We must meet Wayne's brigade at the other end of

the Portage and warn him and his daughter. We must do it for trade and other reasons. You have your disguise all ready. We'll go ashore and fashion mine."

"Ba gar!" cried Drummond with a grimace, "I'm t'ink I'm done wit' dose *diable* trappings, but she's de good cause, an' in de good cause I'm glad to wear dem leetle longaire. An' you, Factor, I'm t'ink mebbe you pick wan off de lake!"

He pointed straight down the north shore.

"You see wan Iroquois Indian paddle in to Grande Portage dis afternoon? Ver' well, dat' de guide of de Montreal mail canoe. De courier send heem ahead de last few miles to report de mail comin'. An' I'm know she's comin' soon, for yondaire's paddles flashin' lak loons' wings off de Temple Rock."

The Hudson's Bay brigade lay fairly in the sun glare streaming like a path of gold across the heaving lake swells. The sun itself was at their backs as they all stared in the indicated direction, and they could see without being readily seen.

"By heavens, you're right!" exclaimed Carlisle. "It surely is the Montreal canoe. I take your hint, Drummond. It is as the courier I shall go in. Missowa"—commanding the Ojibway steersman—"lie in the shelter of yon small island. We cannot be seen there, and there it does not matter to us whether the Northwester takes the inside or the outside passage. Eugene, fall in with the other craft behind."

At a spoken word from Missowa the port

paddlers dipped a strong forward stroke. The starboard paddlers hung with a back-water stroke as strong. The Factor's craft swung in a choppy half-circle and slanted off for the lee of the island round the bouldered point where the big rollers broke in a white smother. Drummond, turning in behind with the six smaller canoes, greeted the motley crowd which filled them, four men to each craft, with a knowing grin.

James Bay Crees the Indians were, together with Ojibways and an occasional Salteaux, all trusted post runners and trippers of the company and all personally known to the voyageur. Known likewise were the white men: Hampton, the younger son of an English squire; Jarvis, the street arab picked up from the pavements of London and in the service as a clerk; Wells, the country youth from a South-of-England shire; Garry and Lea, the two hardy Scots from Inverness and Cromarty; and the hardier Highlander Lewis from the savage Hebrides.

Although Eugene had not seen any of them for nearly eight months he recognized every member of the brigade at a glance. Greatly his volatile nature longed to hail each by his familiar name and pass with each a fitting and peculiar jest, but the Montreal canoe was approaching and silence was the order from Carlisle.

Not long had they to lie in ambush behind the concealing island. Presently arose a sound of water thrown from a pail upon the lake surface in spaced gushes—the splash of careless paddles.

"Line them out, Missowa!" Carlisle commanded in a whisper.

Like magic the eight canoes slipped from concealment and, bow to stern throughout the line, totally barred the channel passage which the Northwest courier was taking for smoother water. His two Iroquois canoe-men brought up the craft suddenly with bending paddle shafts and foaming blades, while the courier himself, a swarthy-skinned Frenchman, half arose in amazement from amidships, either hand upon the gunwales.

"I am Bertand, Northwest mail courier from Montreal," he began in French, "and you are——?"

"Of Hudson's Bay, as you see," smiled Carlisle, answering him in his own tongue.

"And you want——?"

"Your letters, your clothes, and your canoe. The letters will go on safely to Grande Portage. Your clothes and canoe, the same or better, will be returned to you. Meanwhile, you rest quietly on shore here. Do you agree?"

The courier's eyes ran over the line, and he shrugged his shoulders in resignation.

"But yes," he agreed, "because I am no fool, especially in the face of superior numbers."

"Very well," nodded Carlisle, and waved the Northwester's Indian paddlers inshore.

"Eugene," he directed, "put on your shirt and cap and slip back as you came. It is best for us to go in separately, and besides, I leave it to you to get the Iroquois guide who arrived this after-

noon out of my way when I come. Do it any way you can, but be sure to get rid of him short of bludgeoning him. I'll waste no time other than to arrive at a decent interval after you."

"And I, Eugene," put in Father Andrews, abruptly, "shall drift in alone a little ahead of Paul."

Taken unawares, the voyageur exclaimed loudly in his French tongue and darted Andrews another of those sharp wondering looks with which he was wont to regard the priest. *Par Dieu*, here was that mystery again! What *le diable*, he demanded of himself, did a priest want in mixing in such affairs?

And even Carlisle regarded Andrews with grave astonishment.

"You had better not risk it, Father," he advised. "You know there will be danger in the business."

"For you," admitted Andrews, "but not for me! Why should the Northwesters bother their heads about a lone priest? Does my breed not watch at birth of Northwesters and Hudson's Bay men alike, minister to their living needs alike and bury them alike at death? I shall surely go, for I have in mind what Eugene said about the girl."

CHAPTER TWO

GRANDE PORTAGE

DRESSED in the Montreal courier's clothes, the cheap black cotton shirt, travel-soiled mackinaw, trousers, and cowhide moccasins, his face and hands stained with herbs to a swarthy shade and his head covered with a battered blue felt hat pulled well down over his eyes, Carlisle sat amidships in the courier's canoe, the brown canvas, leather-bound mail-sack between his knees as the craft rounded the island which screened Grande Portage Bay.

Their own brilliant and picturesque costumes discarded for the drab gear of the Iroquois canoe-men, Missowa the Ojibway steersman and Waseyawin the Cree bowsman stoically paddled him in with their short, quick strokes. The canoe nosed into the channel, a mile and one quarter wide, and the wilderness post broke suddenly upon his vision.

On his left hand lay the sheltering island with its rubble of great gnarled boulders littering the beach, its long, sloping point sheering up and its rampart of bush standing solid above. On his right spread the amphitheatre of the bay, a crescent sweep of shallow water, delicate green in colour and clear as air, edged by a low, flat shore

which was backed in turn by terraced Laurentian hills.

Tier upon tier they rose, the lowest three hundred feet in height, the highest more than one thousand, covered with crowding forest of birch and spruce and pine, thrusting out virgin arms to embrace the lesser island.

Walling the back of the level shore land and curving westward into the lake rose a natural barrier, a forty-foot cliff of rock. Along the eastern side foamed a small stream, and hard by the stream the post buildings crouched in the clearing. Under the first hill tier they huddled, surrounded by cedar palisades eighteen feet in height.

Tent villages and Indian cabins, spiraled with the smoke of many fires, dotted the eastern bank of the stream, while on the meadows and terraces farther back grazed cattle brought up the lakes in large boats or driven overland by wood trails from St. Paul on the Mississippi.

Over the bouldered channel-bottom, distinctly seen through the intensely clear water, over the pebbled reach farther inshore Carlisle's craft drove straight for a long canoe pier whereon he glimpsed many men at work loading or unloading canoes. As he approached he noted that the pier was built so as to form a canoe harbour. Fashioned of great square-timbered crib-work, spiked with iron, its foundation heavily stone-weighted to hold it in the bay, it was formed by two arms.

The long western arm or shoreway streaked

out from the curving sand beach into the bay, meeting at an angle the short eastern or harbour arm which extended but half-way back to land. Thus with only a narrow water gate for entrance was enclosed a canoe harbour which was safe for fragile craft in any storm.

Though only a slight swell disturbed the channel outside, the harbour inside was calmer still. It lay like a mill-pond parting to Carlisle's rippling bows as he passed the fur sloop *Otter*, lashed to the pier just outside the water, and the arm of the pier itself, his eyes following the curving bilge of the sloop from water-line to keel and marking the bottom-most timbers of the crib work weed-grown in the clear green depths. Who had built the old pier he did not know, for here he touched upon ancient ground.

Perhaps, he thought, it was the wanderer Dulhut who first of all established Grande Portage post in 1670. Perhaps it was the later adventurer Lanove who rebuilt Dulhut's post in 1717. Or, again, it might have been any one of the swarm of French and Scotch traders who, after the fall of Quebec to the English in 1759, pushed their trading places along the Great Lakes to Detroit, Michillimackinac, the Sault, the Kaministiquia River, and finally to Grande Portage at the mouth of the Pigeon.

Later, and before Carlisle was born, English traders foregathered there, and a score of fur lords competed, bickered, and fought finally to amalgamate into the Northwest Fur Company with the avowed intention of slowly but surely

sweeping the Hudson's Bay Company from the continent. How well the Northwesters were succeeding in this his own generation Carlisle realized was known only to a few like himself who occupied high posts in the service, and his whole being thrilled at the trust imposed on this few by the older corporation when it commissioned them to throw down the gage of decisive battle.

No ordinary routine incident was his transfer from Moose Factory to Cumberland House but the first move in a mighty struggle which could mean for his company only one of two things: conquest or cession. And how desperate must be that struggle was borne in upon him by the plain truth that here at the very outset he was setting foot into a stronghold of his enemies almost single-handed.

Enemies! His gray eyes lightened with the anticipative gleam of conflict, but abruptly came remembrance of the courier rôle he had assumed, and he motioned his two pseudo Iroquois canoe-men to work him in against the crib.

A pause in the toil and a shout from the toilers greeted him. All along the pier within reach of his hand were tied the big Rabiscaw freight canoes from Montreal, and the men who worked them through the Ottawa and French River and the lake route to Grande Portage were the ones unloading the cargoes they had brought: arms and ammunition: knives, axes, blankets; cottons from the looms of far Manchester, gaudy handkerchiefs of silk and cotton; rope and twine, fishing nets and lines; copper kettles and other

cooking utensils; beads and mirrors; kegs of rum; carrot tobacco, twist tobacco; tea, flour, sugar—articles of food and trade in endless variety.

And the men themselves Carlisle recognized as the giant Pork Eaters famed on the trail, French voyageurs off the Ottawa River and the parishes around, Iroquois Indians, Caughnawaga men, fierce, untamed. They yelled shrilly, the white men dancing joyously at the arrival of the mail, but Carlisle gave no answer other than to shake the pouch suggestively as his canoe glided close in at the end of the shoreway. There he leaped out and, his two canoemen stalking at his back, strode across the flat and in through the open gate of the palisade. Leaving Missowa and Waseyawin in the yard, he went on to the main warehouse where he knew he would find the post-keeper in charge.

With his blood leaping in his body he stepped over the threshold, for he knew also whom he would see sitting there. If his disguise deceived David Thompson he was safe to go where he willed in Grande Portage.

He had full confidence in his masquerade, but at the same time the knowledge that this was a critical test keyed him to severest tension, poised his physical being for a dash to escape if his confidence should not be instantly justified. He carried the mail-sack on his shoulder as he passed between the door-jambs, shooting a glance under the sack and his curved arm, seeking out the keeper.

At sight of a little office railed off from the general warehouse Carlisle's fibres thrilled again, for behind it he beheld Thompson, as ever astronomer and explorer rather than fur trader, poring over his maps and plans.

At the swish of the courier's moccasins he looked up.

"Ha! Art here then," he nodded, his Welsh origin betraying itself in his speech. "Tuh guide reported 'ee some hours ago. Put thy sack down there. Wilt make tuh entry."

As Thompson drew forward the journal of the post, Carlisle silently expelled a deep breath. Thompson had passed him! Thompson who for thirteen years had served in the Hudson's Bay Company with him, who had lived the routine post life or taken the far trail with him. Thompson with whom he had built Manchester House and wintered among the Indians and sojourned at Samuel Hearne's old post, Cumberland House, which was now to be his own.

Thompson with whom he had parted regretfully when, on being ordered by Colen, Factor at York Factory, to do less surveying and get more trade returns! Thompson had left the service in a heat and gone over to the Northwest Company to undertake a journey of discovery that shamed Colen and all the Hudson's Bay. How Carlisle envied him and his new company that feat—the survey west from Grande Portage to Lakes Winnipeg and Winnipegosis, south on the Assiniboine to the Souris, across the plains to the Mandan villages on the Missouri; thence

to the Assiniboine again, down to the Red River, across to the Mississippi's headwaters, northwest to Duluth on Lake Superior, round Superior's shore-line to the Sault, and home once more to Grande Portage.

Four thousand miles of virgin wilderness mapped in ten months and to be fur-farmed on the basis of the mapping by the Northwesters! The magnitude of it was astounding, the attendant loss to the Hudson's Bay Company colossal. Holding his company's honour as he held his own, it hurt Carlisle keenly to think that his former friend and the company's former servant had been the cause.

But of Carlisle's state of feeling Thompson realized nothing. It was to his mind the Montreal mail-courier who stood before him, and he dipped his pen into the pot of brown ink. Carlisle, leaning sideways against the grill, his elbow on the mail-pouch so that his big arm hid most of his face, waited with a renewal of his trepidation, the other entries of the journal, written in the fine, cramped hand he knew so well, dancing before his eyes. But in a moment Thompson finished recording the mail-courier's arrival and closed the book.

"Art free now," he announced. "Thou wilt rest four days. Then 'ee wilt start back for Montreal."

Carlisle flopped his battered hat-brim in a nod of comprehension, swung on his moccasined heels, and passed out without a word to where Missowa and Waseyawin awaited him.

"The order is to start back for Montreal in four days," he informed them with a grim smile. "In the meantime, we are free to amuse ourselves."

"Good," grunted Waseyawin in Cree. "It is well for us to have that knowledge if any man should ask."

"Yes," nodded Carlisle, "and now we must get over the Portage as fast as we can. Have you seen Eug—— Ha! Yonder's his red shirt at the gateway. Come and we'll see how things stand."

Carlisle and Drummond met casually outside the palisade, exchanging brief greetings and passing the news of the trail after the custom of Northmen meeting as strangers, then, still talking carelessly, strolled off up the path which led to Port Charlotte on the Pigeon's bank.

Not till they were completely out of sight of the post did they drop their careless pose, and not till then did the Cree and the Ojibway, who had been loitering behind, presume to catch up with them.

"What about the Iroquois guide?" Carlisle demanded, abruptly, of Drummond.

"He be served wit' extra rum for hees news of the mail comin', an' I'm see dat he get leetle more w'en I come back," chuckled Eugene. "*Mon Dieu*—dancin' drunk—ain't trouble you!"

"And Father Andrews?"

"He be gone on ahead," informed Eugene. "He ver' mooch afraid you be delayed somehow at de post, an' he t'ink in dat case it best for heem to go on to meet dem."

"Then let us hurry up and join him!" exclaimed Carlisle, feverishly. "I want to be there when Wayne and his girl arrive. You lead off, Eugene."

With the woodsman's lope, swift though easy, the lope that never tires, never varies, Drummond led off, Carlisle at his heels, the two Indians swaying lithely in the rear. The Portage was nine miles in all, and for the first half-dozen miles they climbed a stiff grade, dropping into hundred-foot gulches and clambering out again, fording small creeks or thumping over them on roughly timbered bridges, threading swampy beaver meadows on paths of corduroy.

Then they topped the loftiest ridge whence the land rolled down in gentle convolutions to the brink of the river three miles away. Through the heart of a magnificent pinery, speckled here and there along the creeks with birch and poplar, Carlisle and his companions ran upon a trail the like of which was not to be found upon the continent. It was the connecting route between the Great Lakes and the vast West beyond.

Below Port Charlotte the Pigeon River ran wild, plunging in great cascades, unnavigable by even the hardiest voyageurs. There was no following it to its mouth, so brigades from the West unloaded here and packed over the nine-mile carry to Grande Portage on Superior's open water.

Every bale of fur gathered by the Northwesters in that gigantic wilderness from Lake Superior on the east to the Pacific on the west, from the Mississippi's headwaters on the south

to the Arctic Ocean on the north, was freighted here by the Northmen's canoes and carried across on their backs. Likewise all the supplies for that immensity of river, lake, forest, mountain, plain and barren, every pound of food and article of trade brought to Grande Portage by the habiscaw canoes of Montreal, went across in the opposite direction upon the same muscled backs.

All along the rugged, twisting trail Carlisle and the others met or passed them in the act, huge Northmen from the Pays d'en Haut, Pork Eaters, Caughnawagas, and other Iroquois from the Ottawa, monstrosly back-laden, working in the pack-straps in relays, setting down their burdens every thousand yards and breathing themselves as they retraced their steps for more.

Packing for the glory of the packer and a Spanish dollar a hundred pounds, they sweated and toiled, coming and going, dotting the upgrade and the down and hiving thickly 'round the Port Charlotte landing where Carlisle and his three men came out on the river.

"Ba gar, we be none too soon," panted Drummond in a low voice. "Yondaire's Ralph Wayne's brigade."

He pointed toward the mid-current of the Pigeon, and Carlisle glimpsed half-a-dozen canoes swerving in for the landing.

"And there's Father Andrews close by the water's edge!" exclaimed Carlisle. "Slow down to a walk and scatter out a little. And we'd better take packs as we go. Load up with anything handy and drop where I drop mine."

From the spot where the last relay had deposited the loads bound westward over the Portage they took up bundles and sacks of provisions and, bent under them as if they were regular burden bearers, shuffled down through the crowd of Northwesters on the river bank. Carlisle dropped his pack directly behind the priest, and the others following suit, they all straightened up, stretching their arms in the air, pretending to breathe themselves as they idly watched the incoming brigade.

"We're here, Father," Carlisle whispered at Andrews' back, "and so is the Free-Trader, I see. Are you going to tell him or shall I?"

"I must, Paul," returned Andrews in a voice of intense gravity. "It may seem strange to you, but neither Wayne nor his daughter must know your real name—yet. You may wonder, but I tell you in all faith it must be so. It is important—more, it is vital to your interest and Wayne's as well!"

"I must be to him a courier? That is, for the present?"

"Yes. You believe me when I say it is imperative?"

"Of course, Father. You know I have faith in your slightest word."

"All right, let me do the talking. The canoes are almost in."

The prow of the foremost craft all but grazed the landing, then swung broadside in to it under skilful paddle-strokes. From amidships a man of fifty-five or so, clad in buckskin gar-

ments unornamented except for the customary fringes, stepped cleanly out upon the shore. Carlisle, scrutinizing him eagerly, was struck by his great height. Although the Hudson's Bay Factor himself stood fully six feet, this man topped him by four inches, and the impression of height was intensified by his lanky erectness.

Clean-flanked, sloping-shouldered, long-armed, he seemed to poise in the air rather than to stand upon his battered moccasins. His head was bare, and from it the brown hair, luxuriant in spite of his advancing years, ran down in waves and curls almost to his shoulders. His face was darkened by exposure to a mahogany shade in which the only high lights that showed were the golden flash of odd-coloured eyes, eyes between a fawn and a green hue, and the sheen of the copper-coloured moustache which swept down in long, heavy curves over the grim mouth.

Every inch a frontiersman, Carlisle sensed about him that greatness of spirit which ineffaceably clings to those who have dared the wilderness in all its immensity, all its ruthlessness, all its cruelty, who have dared it and conquered and inevitably in the conquering brought the depths of their natures to the surface. Even while Carlisle swiftly appraised him, he stooped with agility, one hand on the canoe gunwale, the other held toward his daughter to steady her as she disembarked.

Out upon the landing she leaped beside him, and although her head scarcely reached to his shoulder Carlisle recognized in her swelling-

hipped, full-bosomed figure the erect, agile, supple poise of her father. It showed in the curve and grace of her ankles and calves, encased in elk-skin moccasins and revealed by the short gray wool canoe skirt she wore. It showed, too, in the straight arms whose swell of forearm and upper arm but enhanced the direct line of her limbs.

But her looks, he knew, she must have inherited from her mother. For here was no skin of swarthy shade or mahogany tan. Fair as Northland snows was the face revealed as she threw back the veil of mosquito netting 'round her head. Indeed, so pallid shone her complexion in contrast with her father's that it seemed to be wanly bleached, and her hair, yellow, wheaten, and spun-gold all in one—like the mingling hues of birchen leaves in autumn—seemed, against his brown hanging curls, to be likewise bleached.

But Carlisle was aware that the art of bleaching did not extend north to latitude fifty-four, and besides, the glow and sheen of both skin and hair told that they were natural, as natural as the lake-blue laughing eyes or the spray of crimson which tinged her cheeks at either side of the delicately chiselled nose.

"Grande Portage at last, father!" she exclaimed, laughing so that her red lips parted whimsically, poutingly, over splendid teeth. "It is good to get the canoe cramps out!"

"Yes, Joan," nodded her father, a smile cracking the grim mahogany of his face, "it's

been a long day. But here's a nine-mile walk to stretch your legs."

"You've come far then, I take it," put in Father Andrews, rising from the bundle upon which he sat and extending his hand to the frontiersman.

"From Fort Wayne on Sturgeon Lake," replied the other, returning his grip. "I'm Ralph Wayne the Free-Trader, and this is my daughter Joan. We're bound to Montreal. And you, I see by your netting, have followed the mosquito-pestered trail, too. Where are you bound, Father?"

"But here," responded the priest, turning his head to see that none of the Northwesters were in hearing and speaking in a lower voice. "I am Father Andrews, and I've come with a warning. Richelieu and his partners have closed the Portage as private ground. They will seize you at the post. The partners want your trade, I understand, and Richelieu—well," with a nod aside at Joan, "Richelieu wants something else."

Into the fawn-green eyes in the mahogany gloom of Wayne's face blazed a light like the flare of lightning in a murky cloud. Instinctively his hand fell upon Joan's arm in a protecting gesture, his tall frame straightened another inch, and his sweeping moustaches began to quiver as a precursor of violent speech:

But Andrews was quick to forestall him.

"Be careful," the priest warned, hurriedly, "be very careful. These Northwesters all know what is going to happen to you, but don't

precipitate it by letting them know that you know. Is there any chance of your getting back up the Pigeon by a swift dash now? Are there any of their fleets afloat?"

"Two of their Winnepegosis brigades behind me," rasped Wayne in a voice virulent with bitterness and rage. "If things are as you say, they'll be notified, too. There's no chance to pass them."

"Then there is nothing left to do but try for escape at the Superior end," decided Andrews. "You won't be able to count on your own men, since they'll be watched or overpowered, but you may count on me and these four behind me: the courier, the voyageur, and the two Indians. Trust them as you would me!"

"Thank God for your kindness and your warning, Father!" breathed Wayne, turning in the middle of his words as if from some trivial conversation loudly to order his men to lift the canoes and adjust the fur bales in tump lines for packing over to Grande Portage. "Thank God for it, I say, on account of my girl. If we can manage to get her safely through, for the rest I do not care."

"But I do, father," declared Joan in a tremulous voice. "If I get through, you must, too. Otherwise I don't want to."

And as the white men of Wayne's brigade, men of the Mississippi, men of the Missouri, men of the Red—independent-spirited adventurers like himself—together with his Crees and Chipewyans, shuffled off under their burdens of

canoes and furs on the upgrade from Port Charlotte, the girl flashed a glance at the four whom Father Andrews had named as to be trusted.

"Tell me," she urged, intensely, with the painful desire of one who will know the worst, "is there any real chance of getting through?"

Her beseeching eyes went past Drummond, past Missowa and Waseyawin, as if the magnetic personality of Carlisle, hidden though it was, drew them to himself, and for the first time since he had assumed the courier's disguise the Factor silently cursed his masquerade.

"By heavens, yes, a real chance," he swore, fervently, "for rather than see harm come to you, I myself will sheathe a knife in Richelieu's heart!"

CHAPTER III

AN INTERRUPTED BANQUET

CARLISLE and his men running empty-handed had loped over the Portage in a little better than an hour, but it was more than a two-hours' walk back for the laden brigade, and the laggard summer dark came down as they neared the post. All the way across the two groups had kept well separated so as not to invite the notice or arouse the suspicions of the trooping Northwesters who at the end of their day's work were flocking back to Grande Portage, and in the ordinary routine of superintending the packing, Ralph Wayne had managed to let each member of his brigade know what to expect.

That no Northwester attempted to molest them yet or even speak to them further than to pass the customary greetings of the trail did not make them any easier in mind, for it was plain that throughout every mile of the nine they were unostentatiously kept under vigilance. One large body straggled ahead of them, one behind them upon the winding path, and when they reached the square of the palisades they became aware that there were crowds of men as a preventive of flight between them and the open beach.

Instinctively the two groups which policy had kept separate now united against a common menace. Carlisle gradually worked his way to the head of the line, close to Joan Wayne, while Eugene Drummond, Missowa, and Waseyawin glided silently at his back. Hard at their heels came the Free-Trader and the priest, themselves trailed by the thirty-odd brigade men bunching together under their packs of fur.

As they passed into the stockade a ribald clamour greeted them, sounds of men singing and shouting and roaring with laughter, all sharply punctuated by the explosive popping of corks and the crash of a shattered wine-glass on hard boards. The babel rose from a big residence building which they were skirting, and as Carlisle, the girl, and the rest came into line with its row of open, lighted windows the brilliant scene within the dark-walled building flashed vividly upon their eyes.

Under flaring hanging lamps 'round many feasting tables, spread up and down the long hall, were gathered together one hundred or more officers of the Northwest Company, interpreters, guides, clerks, wintering partners from the West meeting here the executive partners from the East, the most aggressive of the thirty-five lords of Beaver Hall.

Among the rows of faces Carlisle glimpsed many known to him, MacGillivray and Sager from Fond du Lac, Todd from Fort des Prairies, James McKenzie, Grant, McTavish, and McLeod from English River and the Athabasca, McKay

from the Swamp Country, Roderick McKenzie and the rest of his cronies from Montreal, and lastly, Simon Richelieu, black-bearded of face, ramrod-like of figure, resplendent in the uniform of a French colonel, reckless, voluble, addressing half-a-dozen different persons at the same moment.

There they sat noisily devouring such epicurean marvels as bison's hump, moose's nose, beaver's tail, wassailing in the finest Italian, French, and Spanish wines and flinging their souls out in laughter and song. But even as those outside gazed and passed the windows, the clamour stilled with strange abruptness. It was evident that a messenger had entered and spoken, that Wayne's unostentatious warders upon the Portage had communicated with their roistering overlords. The company rose in a body and, Simon Richelieu in the lead, poured out upon the steps and sand terrace of the building.

Richelieu stood upon the outer step, the lamp-light falling upon his gay uniform, laughing like a sardonic devil in his black beard and bowing his ramrod body from the hips.

"Welcome, Ralph Wayne!" he chuckled. "Welcome, Mademoiselle Joan. The supper is ready. *Mon Dieu*, but I thought you were never coming!"

"The devil!" exclaimed Wayne, startled in spite of forewarning. "What does this pleasantry mean?"

"I'll tell you," spat Richelieu, the iron in him

showing up through his levity as he shoved his brutal, domineering face into Wayne's. "I'll tell you, Ralph. For several years we have tried to buy your trade, which you switch in secret to the Hudson's Bay——"

"You lie, Richelieu!" thundered Wayne.

Richelieu, his face contorted, doubled up his arm as if to strike but with a glance at the girl thought better of it and flung out his open hand with a dramatic snap of the finger.

"There! But I will have the Indian whippers whip that out of your hide in the post cellars to-night!"

"No, no, Colonel," cut in the voice of David Thompson who arrived suddenly out of nowhere and the dark, "wilt have no whipping in my post whilst I am keeper."

"*Ciel*, Thompson, but your tongue is ready! If it were not that we need your map-making I would have you drafted for that."

"But I knows 'ee do need tuh maps," nodded Thompson. "So wilt have no whippin' in tuh cellars. Besides, would break tuh wine bottles."

"Well spoken, whatever, Davvy," grinned James McKenzie, while the company roared and Richelieu, himself catching the contagion, relaxed into laughter again at the public criticism of his own habits.

"Thompson, for that thrust I forgive you, and Ralph Wayne escapes," he chortled. "Are you not glad, Ralph? As I was saying, we need your trade, and so because it is easier to take you

here than at Fort Wayne we do so. Also because Mademoiselle Joan would as usual flout me there I take her here where there is no flouting. Understand me? *Hola*—couriers, voyageurs, *métis* all—seize them!’

Instantly Carlisle’s arms were ’round Joan Wayne, making show of seizing her before any one else could touch her. And swift as he, Eugene Drummond, Missowa, and Waseyawin laid rough hands on Wayne and held him fast. Seeing the principles apparently in the grasp of their own men, the rest of the Northwesters pounced in a body upon Wayne’s laden brigade and before they could drop their canoes and packs their arms were gripped from either side by many hands.

“Off to the cellars with the canoe-men,” ordered Richelieu, and pushing, fighting, cursing, making vain efforts to break from the grip of so many hands, Wayne’s brigade swayed out into the dark.

“Now, Ralph Wayne, come and eat supper with me, you and Mademoiselle Joan, and see if a full stomach and a bottle of good wine will make you change your mind. If you show sense, you may come back to my Sturgeon Lake post with Joan and me. If you do not show sense, you will go to join your men in the cellars while Joan goes back alone with me.”

The moment he heard the words, Father Andrews pushed through the crowd past his friends, elbowing his way to the front.

“Richelieu is half drunk,” he whispered to

them as he went. "They are all half drunk—all but Thompson. Mark my speech and follow my move!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Richelieu, staring at Andrews in surprise. "Who is this? But wait. I remember now. You are the Jesuit missionary who asked a night's shelter at the post." He gave Andrews a friendly hand. "Donald McKay spoke of you this afternoon, but I did not catch the name."

"Andrews!"

"*Par Dieu*, yes! I know more of that name than you think perhaps. How discourteous of me not to have inquired better. A famous name, Father, and a herald of deeds. I have heard of you for years. You go among the men of the rival Hudson's Bay, too, eh?"

"Chiefly to bury them," answered Andrews, gravely.

"Ho! Ho! You are a wit, Father. I had heard that. You must join us in the meal. You must sit at my table with Mademoiselle and her father. *Comment?* Was there anything else you wanted?"

"I just wanted to ask about the maiden," parleyed the priest, calmly turning to Joan Wayne. "It occurred to me that she may not be willing to have you carry her off like a buccaneer to your Sturgeon Lake post."

"Ah! Mademoiselle is, Father, only she does not know that she is."

"I only know," flashed Joan with a hate and passion in her voice that bit like flame, "that as

sure as you put out one finger to touch me, you will feel a knife in your heart."

But Richelieu roared in ridicule.

"*Ciel*, listen to that!" he pooh-poohed. "What a death from gentle hands! And, *par Dieu*, I believe it would be worth it. Would it not, Father Andrews? Name of a name, yes! I do not care to remember the number of months she has driven me crazy with her coy refusals and her floutings. And is she a mate to hide away or be ashamed of?"

"*Diable*, just look at her there—just look! But come, my stomach's hungering for my unfinished supper, and I can't wait much longer. Come, Father, come all!"

"But it is not right for casual travellers to take up space at your tables to the exclusion of your own men who have worked hard all day," demurred Andrews to gain time. "Here are packers whom I see to be ravenous for their meal, and I who have cause to know something of hunger will keep no man waiting while I eat in his place."

"These do not eat with the officers," Richelieu pointed out, "and they do not all eat at once. Neither is their fare what ours is, although at the same time it is good enough for them."

"For them?" echoed Andrews. "Are we all not dwellers in the wilderness together? And is one man not as good as another? Richelieu, I have heard of you, even as you have heard of me, and I know you are no niggard. Therefore I ask a favour. It is a special occasion, so let these

men eat at once with us and eat of the best you have. When strangers come, men keep an open board."

"*Mon Dieu*, no, I am no niggard," Richelieu boasted, pompously. "I grudge them nothing, Father, for they serve me well, and they shall have what you say and all that you say. Only, none of the Grande Portage buildings will hold one tenth of their number."

"True, yet the stockade ground here will hold them all," suggested Andrews, craftily straining for the point he wished to gain. "And it is lighted like day with the canoemen's fires on yonder beach. Have canoemen and all gather here to eat and let every man of your company see for himself how fair a mate sits at your table."

"*Ciel*, but you have spoken it, Father!" cried Richelieu, swallowing the bait offered to his conceit, to his love of pomp and display. "Thompson, send out the word to the beach for them all to gather within the stockades. They can sit on the steps and the sand terrace, and I will have them served with food and wine where they sit."

Thompson himself strode out of the stockade ground and moved amid the mob across the level sand beach toward the shoreway of the long canoe pier. At his word the canoemen, leaving their fires with joyous whoops over their good fortune, surged up the beach and into the stockade ground.

"Just when Richelieu turns to lead us in—

run for the sloop!" was all Andrews had opportunity to whisper to Carlisle who, under Richelieu's watchful eye, still had Joan by the arms.

Carlisle passed the whisper to Eugene Drummond, Missowa, and Waseyawin who likewise had their hands upon the Free-Trader, and they all felt their tense nerves thrill vibrantly as the last of the mob of canoemen came in through the gateway. It required only a slight shifting of their gaze to mark the eastern cribwork of the old canoe pier where the fur sloop *Otter*, empty after its run to the Falls of St. Mary, lightly rubbed its rail against the timbers.

The harbour water within the angle of the pier and also the curve of the sand beach nearer at hand were lined with canoes. The beach itself, starred with scores of campfires sending their crimson flares across the lake, was deserted as Andrews had schemed.

Here, stamping on the sand terrace, climbing on the steps were the men who had peopled it, eleven hundred and twenty enrolled canoemen—thirty-six brigades—the total strength of the Northwest Company's boatmen drawn from the world's outposts and massed together in one spot, three hundred and fifty Rabiscaw paddlers of Montreal, in company with all the countless Indians of the district gathered for the yearly trade, the carousal, and the carnival.

Never had Carlisle gazed on so weird and motley a horde of Northmen and Indians and nowhere else on the continent could Richelieu

have marshalled such a retinue. For these men Canada and the Atlantic States were only faint memories somewhere East. The Church for them was an impression fainter still. No man-made law had they ever seen forged farther than the Sault.

They drew breath in an unclaimed land, and rum and bedlam rioted in their hearts. Only their fear of Richelieu postponed their songs and their brawls as they jostled up for their unexpected feast, and in the moment of their silence Richelieu raised his voice from the threshold of his dining hall.

"Ho! Northmen from the Pays d'en Haut, and you Rabiscaw paddlers from Montreal," he smirked. "*Voilà!* Here is a priest with a kind heart, and on his thoughtful suggestion I——"

The snoring surge of waters swiftly cloven, a triumphal yell out of the lakeward dark, the thump of a quickly wielded paddle upon a canoe gunwale interrupted Richelieu, and the next instant a lone birch-bark craft tore through the water-gate of the pier and spilled its single occupant upon the beach outside the stockade.

"Who in the devil are you?" bellowed Richelieu, glaring truculently as the intruder bounded in through the open gateway and drove like a wedge up the jammed steps.

"Bertand—Montreal mail-courier—waylaid—just escaped from the Hudson's Bay men's camp down the north shore," panted the courier in French, his furtive eyes, filled with the streaming lamplight, scanning them over. "And

there," levelling an excited finger at Carlisle, "is their Factor wearing my very clothes!"

Carlisle, his left hand keeping its hold on the arm of Joan Wayne, launched his mighty body forward. His right foot shot into Bertand's chest, his right fist into the black beard of Richelieu, and both men, catapulted back off the steps, went rolling down the sand terrace among the massed men.

Swift as he struck he wheeled with the girl, to find that his companions had been equally quick. As one man they had vaulted over the railing of the steps, sheer over the heads of the crowd sitting on the terrace beneath, knocking flat a dozen in the outer rank who stood directly in the way.

Before they had fairly landed, Carlisle, gathering Joan in his arms, leaped after them. He alighted ankle-deep in the sand, plowing a furrow for yards in the loose, sugary grains, and without halting his impetus plunged for the opening in the stockade.

With a yell of exultation his five comrades clanged it behind him and dropped the bar in place on the outside just as the roaring avalanche of Northmen brought up against it. Then like fleeing deer they were across the beach, out on the pier, and into the fur sloop *Otter*, Missowa and Waseyawin severing the hempen hawsers with their sheath knives, Drummond kicking loose the tiller, and Wayne and the priest running up the big mainsail with a jerk.

The breeze had shifted at dark. It now blew

steadily from the south, snoring in through the channel, and like a live, palpitant thing the vessel responded to its urge. They could see Richelieu's horde of Northmen climbing the eighteen-foot palisades and dropping to the ground outside, but before these could reach the water's edge the mainsail tightened with a clatter of blocks, the boom uprose, and the *Otter* heeled over as she left the pier.

Ashore reigned bedlam, pandemonium, all the vast motley crowd shuttling crazily in the light of scores of fires, shouting, explaining, commanding and countermanding. Northwest officers were dashing out on the pier, yelling directions as they ran, McTavish, MacGillivray and Todd in the lead, and fragments of their shouts rang stridently on the ears of those in the boat upon the channel.

"——, off in the sloop!" McTavish was roaring. "Launch the canoes and stop them!"

"Condemned scoundrels, those four—" it was the shrill declamation of Todd—"and the rascally priest as well!"

And, loudest of all, the bull-moose call of MacGillivray demanding of his partner—

"Sager, Sager, where in perdition are our Fond du Lac brigades?"

Into the huge Rabiscaw canoes they were madly urging the crews, all clamouring at once and spurred by the curses of Richelieu who with the Montreal mail-courier, Bertand, was running here and there like a madman, his uniform all dirty and his black beard filled with sticky sand

as he spat forth French, English, Cree and Chippewayan in one breath.

But the Rabiscaws, even though manned by twenty paddles, could not beat the wind. The *Otter*, already in midchannel, maintained her lead, rounded the island, and tore like a racing yacht down the rugged loom of the north shore.

"Out of the desert into the mirage, as the Western saying goes!" breathed Joan, all her suspense and anxiety of the last few minutes finding an expression in a hysterical laugh.

"Yes," bantered Carlisle, "you were prisoners of the Northwesters. Now you are prisoners of the Hudson's Bay—with every prospect of improved treatment. We'll pick up my brigade at their camp down here and go on to the mouth of the Kaministiquia."

"So it's not a courier I have to thank after all but a Factor," she marvelled, whimsically. "And your men were in the masquerade, too!"

"As it happened," he admitted. "Drummond, at the tiller yonder, gave us warning on the lake, and it all worked out as you saw. Andrews was a marvel."

"He was that," put in Wayne, warmly, "not to speak of yourself. I am not the man to forget such a service. To what post do you belong?"

"Lately to Moose Factory but to Cumberland House when I reach there."

"The devil! The Factor to fight us, eh? And your name?"

"Carlisle."

With an animal-like snarl Wayne let go the jib

halyard and snatched the sheath knife from the belt of Missowa by his side. His face under the weak starlight was a veritable blaze of ferocity, and his fawn-green eyes shone like the eyes of a lynx as he lunged at Carlisle with the long steel blade.

"Stop, man, wait!" appealed Andrews, leaping as Wayne lunged.

But quick as was the priest to spring, Joan was quicker. She launched herself between her father and Carlisle, her hands upon Wayne's striking arm, her whole weight bearing down upon it like a leaden clog.

"Father, you are mad!" she shrieked. "He has just saved us from Richelieu. You're forgetting the wilderness code. You can't touch him."

For a moment they swayed thus in the careening sloop under the reeling stars, Carlisle grimly amazed, vaguely angered, poised for resistance, Wayne suddenly frozen still in his fury, moving nothing but his fawn-green eyes in continual shift from the Factor to the beseeching girl on his arm. Then the Free-Trader's body relaxed with a sound like a groan as he allowed Joan to wrest the knife from his fingers and push him down to his seat.

"No, you're right, girl," he mumbled. "It's the code. I can't touch him—yet!"

Carlisle also sat down.

"By heavens," he sneered, sensing nothing but bitter trade antagonism, "I like your knife-edged gratitude!"

But Eugene Drummond, replacing the long sweep he had unshipped to crash down upon the Free-Trader's head from behind, sensed something deeper. It was the *diable* mystery he had always sensed! Here it was darker than ever. Andrews knew of it. Wayne knew of it. The Factor did not know. That was plain.

Eugene shook his raven hair this way and that and swore darkly into the driving wind as he brought the *Otter* back on her course.

For, *mon Dieu*, had he not seen enough to know that between the names Wayne and Carlisle there was hate or fear or wrong, blood-feud or crime or worse?

CHAPTER FOUR

AMBUSCADE

THEIR weapons in their hands, the Hudson's Bay men started up from their camp on the north shore as Drummond steered the *Otter* in, half-a-dozen hands let go the sheets and Carlisle himself sprang out into their midst.

"By a' the wilderness gods, Factor, what's happened noo?" cried Lewis. "Why are ye back? Who are yer prisoners? An' what in the de'il are ye daein' wi' the Northwesters' sloop? I kenned at first it was a drunken crew o' the French Company led by yon slippery courier Bertand!"

"I'm back, Lewis," laughed Carlisle, "because Richelieu and his partners are in too great force at Grande Portage and the Kaministiquia is the only other route into the West. These with me are Ralph Wayne, the Sturgeon Lake Free-Trader, and his daughter Joan who thought the Hudson's Bay Company men better warders than the Northwesters. And we stole the sloop in order to escape. We'll beach it somewhere up the Kaministiquia. I have to get into the Pays d'en Haut with all speed. Things have come to a head now on the Saskatchewan."

"Shades o' Rupert, ye are sayin' so, Factor?"

blurted Lewis, nodding to Wayne and doffing his Glengarry cap to Joan. "Tae a heid?"

"Yes, to a head," repeated Carlisle, "and the quicker I am on the ground the better. Who let Bertand the courier away?"

"Yon hound o' a Chippewa, Cotameg! Cotameg was his warder, ye ken, an' he dozed lang enough tae let the courier roll ower tae the mosquito smudge an' burn the thongs frae his wrists an' ankles."

"Fine him three months' pay," was Carlisle's swift judgment. "If the like happens again, he leaves the service. Understand, Lewis? Now strike camp at once!"

The *Otter* took them all aboard, men, dunnage, and canoes, and bore away for the mouth of the Kaministiquia River. Before daylight they made it, tacked about in the face of a strong head wind, and through the dark ran unseen past the sleeping Northwest post. On up the river they scudded till with the first streak of dawn the *Otter* grounded in rapid-broken shallows.

Carlisle leaped out and caught his gear bag tossed from the hands of Drummond.

"Eugene," he ordered, "have the canoes loaded and all ready to go on while I get rid of these courier's clothes."

He disappeared into a thicket up the shore and in a few minutes appeared again, the swarthy stain washed from his face and hands, the battered, blue felt hat, cheap cotton shirt, and trousers gone. He was his old self once more, clad in his cap of soft amber leather, rich blanket-

coat, deerskin knickerbockers, and high-cut moccasins, and with the assumption of his own garments he had immediately assumed the greater exclusiveness of his rank.

Above all others in the brigade he loomed large on the conception, calm, self-reliant, determined, the reckless impulse of youth within him curbed by an ancient wisdom, his whole personality, manner, speech, invested with unostentatious dignity, surcharged with irrevocable authority.

As he walked down to the shallows where Joan Wayne and her father awaited the preparations of the brigade, the girl gave an involuntary exclamation. She had expected some change in his appearance but not such a change as this.

Great as was the difference between the status of courier and Factor, just so great was the difference she saw, and the spray of red in her cheeks deepened and ran riot as she remembered the grip of his arms 'round her in Grande Portage and the ring of his voice as he swore he would save her from Richelieu.

But her father at her side was in no such pleasant attitude of mind. Joan, glancing at him, saw his face working with an emotion that was nothing less than terrible.

"Charlie Carlisle!" he was reiterating in a low, snarling tone. "Charlie Carlisle all over again!"

"Paul Carlisle, father!" corrected Joan, laying a hand on his arm to quiet him. "Paul, I heard Father Andrews call him. Be calm, won't you? He's our enemy in trade only, and why should you make it such a bitter personal hate?"

"You don't know what you are talking about, girl," growled Wayne, "you don't know. By the Doom—the image of his father before him!"

Wayne's hand went to his waist, clutching for the weapon that was not there. As his fingers fumbled helplessly, he seemed to remember his present plight and with a curse abruptly turned his back.

"All ready, Eugene?" called Carlisle, cheerfully.

"*Oui, Factor,*" assured Drummond, sweeping an expressive hand over the fleet. "All ready for start. I be got to double oop two crews in dese canoes on account dose crafts Fadder Andrews an' Bertand left on Grande Portage."

With Garry as steersman, Eugene himself had taken charge of one of these canoes, the second in the line, where from its bow he could command the whole brigade, and the fact that in so short a time every bit of dunnage was trimmed for balance, every paddler in his proper position, bespoke his keen efficiency.

Behind him, one in charge of each separate craft, were the three white men, Lewis, Hampton, and Lea. Ahead of him floated the splendid six-fathom canoe of the Factor, lipping a flat rock in the shallows, waiting for its owner, its crimson flag and gonfalon crackling as before, the gay woollen streamers blowing from the paddle shafts, and the paddlers themselves poised in their bright costumes of gaily-decorated moccasins, leggings, sashes, fillets, and plumes.

And gayest of all posed Waseyawin and

Missowa, standing in the high, curved bow and stern, their common disguises thrown aside to let the wilderness world know their rank as bowsman and steersman.

Carlisle's eye glistened with pride as he glanced them over, but with only a momentary dwelling his gaze passed on to Wayne and his daughter.

"Now it comes to your decision." He spoke bluntly yet in the spirit of earnest friendliness. "I can double up another crew and spare you a canoe to go on to Montreal as you intended. You may walk down the bank to the Kaministiquia post. Or you may come back with me to Cumberland House. In the first two cases you go freely. In the third case you will be in custody."

Wayne's eyes held Carlisle's with a blazing gleam. His whole intense being seemed to leap out in that bitter gaze, leaving his lips no mission in speech, and it was Joan, tremulous and fearful of his wrath, who hastily answered for him.

"There is no use in our going on to Montreal," she pointed out. "The furs are gone—a sixty-thousand-dollar cargo. Besides, neither I nor my father wants to risk going into Northwest headquarters after what happened at Grande Portage. You know that."

"Yes, I judged so," nodded Carlisle. "Then it's the Kaministiquia post or Cumberland House. And I hope it's Cumberland House. You see, white women are so scarce in this land

that a man does not meet and part with them lightly. Good heavens! I spent four years in London, and there was a woman there for every square rod of the city.

"I've lived seventeen years in wilderness posts, and in all that time seen very few. Do you understand? It's made me appreciate them wonderfully, and somehow, now when I look at you, I'm—I'm—well, frankly, I'm glad that I've seen but few!"

Joan flushed at his patent warmth.

"But it's for my father to say," she evaded in confusion.

"It's Cumberland House," cut in Wayne, suddenly finding speech and taking Carlisle's option as if he had heard nothing that intervened. "Condemnation! Why should we rot in the Kaministiquia post? We will go back to our own district, Joan, the district they would wrest from us, and there, by the Doom, they'll see who does the wresting!"

"You'll give parole?" asked the Factor, ignoring the threat.

"No," thundered Wayne. "Put a guard on us and keep us if you can!"

"Very well," nodded Carlisle, grimly, "my eyes will be guard enough."

He took a step aside to where Father Andrews waited silently on the bank.

"A strange, violent man, Father—yes, and bitter as gall against the Hudson's Bay!" he whispered. "If it were not for the girl's sake, I would give him back some of his own medicine."

She interests me greatly. So will you pair amidships with Wayne, then? The girl and I will sit behind you."

"As you like, Paul," agreed the priest, taking the indicated place. "I am glad you have your temper under control. There is no gain in letting it slip."

Carlisle gave Joan his hand as she stepped in, but when he motioned the Free-Trader to follow, the latter drew back defiantly.

"I ride in the next," he growled. "I will not ride with you. Though you've put me under the code, my hands still itch for the Ojibways' knives."

"All right, if you feel like that," assented the Factor.

He waved Wayne aboard Drummond's craft.

"Eugene," he enjoined, "he is under your eye!"

Then he stepped into his own canoe, meeting with a good-humoured laugh Joan's deprecatory face. Rendered ashamed, as well as alarmed, by her father's fresh defiance, she had remained standing, perturbed, uncertain as to the outcome of the verbal clash. Now, quite naturally, they sat down together upon the rich ermine robe, and the brigade shot up the Kaministiquia.

In the wake of La Verendrye, whose prow had first cut these waters in 1731, they went, and as the silence of the forest enveloped them Eugene Drummond's clear tenor struck up an air to time the paddles of his canoemen.

All day and half the night the fleet wound up

the rock-walled, spruce-hedged Kaministiquia to its source, Lake Shebandowan, across golden Shebandowan, over jewelled Lake Kashaboyes toward the range of granite which hurled the Western waters back to Winnipeg.

The setting sun did not drop behind the gray crags of the range till nine in the evening, and then the orange-rose afterglow burned its witch-light for an hour more. But abruptly as the orange-rose turned saffron stalked the jealous dark, and night and the brigade camped together upon the crest of the Superior Divide.

At morning they left the Height of Land behind them, and like the flash of their paddles the days went by as they plunged down the western slope of the watershed through Lac des Mille Isles, the Seine River, Rainy Lake, Rainy River, and Lake of the Woods. All the way by paddle, pole, and portage Eugene Drummond pitched the canoe song for his gay-souled voyageurs.

Ralph Wayne's glowering hate grew darker as he hit upon no opportunity to escape, and the strangely begun intimacy between Joan and Carlisle blossomed and thrived at a pace that set her father to brooding. Stately figures upon the vast tapestry of forest verdure they passed with no untoward incident until after leaving Lake of the Woods.

Then as they rounded a bend of the Winnipeg River some miles above Lac du Bonnet, Waseyawin uttered a cry of warning from the bow of the Factor's flying canoe. Instantly Missowa and the middlemen caught it. Their blades

back-watered with a gurgling roar, and the prow of the craft brought up within ten feet of a chaos of dead tamarack trunks which choked the stream.

"A windfall, eh?" cried Father Andrews. "That was a close thing, Paul."

"No—no windfall!" declared Carlisle, standing up to see better. "Look at the axe marks on the butts. It's a barricade. Missowa, Waseyawin—back! Back, Drummond—quick!"

But hard on his words and before the brigade had time to swing about came the chug-chug of axes behind them. A score of dead birches swayed out from the bushy margin and crashed into the river in an impassable tangle of crossed trunks and interwoven branches. And out upon the barricades before and behind poured more than one hundred Northwesters, the choppers with their bright-bladed axes still in hand, the others with long-barrelled rifles trained on the Hudson's Bay brigade.

Carlisle recognized on the instant James and Roderick McKenzie, McLeod and McDougall with their returning Athabasca brigades, and Richelieu with his Sturgeon Lake brigade, all apparently bound into the Pays d'en Haut.

"*Mon Dieu*, Carlisle, but I have you trapped now!" roared Richelieu. "You and Ralph Wayne and mademoiselle and your renegade priest!"

"Yes, Carlisle," guffawed Roderick McKenzie. "I had thought you too good a woodsman to put your head into a deadfall like that."

"Never mind your tongue play, you two," the impetuous McLeod cut in on them. "Take these men prisoners, lift their arms, clear yon barricade, and let's be on our way!"

"In my own good time, McLeod," bullied Richelieu. "Neither you nor any other man can hurry me. You see, Carlisle, you've tried the patience of McLeod and the others. The Pigeon River route into the Lake of the Woods is faster than the Kaministiquia route and, *par Dieu*, we've waited for you here longer than we've liked. *Comprenez-vous?* Do you surrender quietly?"

Carlisle, sweating in the sun-heat off the river which seemed suddenly to have grown more intense, cast swift, calculating glances to right, to left, and behind.

"Surrender?" he echoed, trying to gain time by parleying and all the while seeking for some means of apparently impossible escape. "What under heaven do you Northwesters set yourselves up to be? Even though your claim to Grande Portage holds good—and I tell you bluntly that it doesn't—this is not Grande Portage. This is the Winnipeg—the West, and I want to ask you by what right you stop any traveller on Winnipeg waters?"

"By the right of might, *m'sieu'*," answered Richelieu, insolently. "We have our secret service also, and we know your mission into the Saskatchewan. *Ciel*, do you think I am fool enough to let you go on to Sturgeon Lake when I have the chance to cut you off here? It was

my plan to take you at Grande Portage, but there was a slip. I lost track of you for a little—until the courier Bertand exposed you.

“*Diable*, I have not forgotten your masquerade, nor the blow you gave me. For everything you will answer *toute suite*, Carlisle—*oui*, and mademoiselle will come back where she belongs.”

Through every word of Richelieu’s tirade Carlisle felt his face fairly crisping with the increasing heat. He put his feeling down to the well-nigh unbearable suspense of the moment and to the fact that they lay motionless upon the sun-refracting water in windless air held stagnant by the forested shores. But as Richelieu finished his bold prophecy, a sharp tang, permeating the heat wave, stung Carlisle’s sensitive nostrils.

“Smoke!” he exclaimed, hoarsely, to the others in the canoe. “Is that another trick of these curs?”

McDougall, up on the loftiest log of the barricade, caught the tang at the same moment. He whirled suddenly to face down stream.

“Holy Dog-Ribs,” he shouted. “Look—Richelieu, look! The whole forest’s on fire!”

McDougall pointed aghast where, not more than five hundred yards away, as far ’round the river bend as he could see, a black pall rolled up above the tamarack tops along both banks and shooting flames darted like red, horned devils between the dark trunks.

“*Diablement*,” Richelieu swore. “Some of your careless whelps have dropped match or

pipe, McDougall! Run, everybody, run! In canoes and up stream! And, *mon Dieu*, paddle for your cursed lives!"

He himself led the route before the charging flames, plunging headlong from the barricade into the thicket of green where they had hidden their canoes when they arranged the ambushade. Like madmen the hundred of them ripped and tore through the growth, bending, chopping, trampling down obstructing saplings and shoving their crafts afloat above the upper barricade.

"Name of a name, come on!" yelled Richelieu, as the paddles foamed away. "Carlisle—Wayne—Joan *chère*—all you there, *hola!* Follow us. It's your only chance."

"What do you think, Drummond?" snapped Carlisle, feverishly. "Follow and be captured or try to run through the fire?"

"Ba gar," breathed his brigade leader, "she's so hot I'm t'ink we burn to cinder. Still de smoke she seem to start close. Mabbe I be take wan look an' see. If de rivaire be smokin' for miles we nevaire do it. If she's shallow fire mebbe we make de dash."

In an attempt to gage the depth of the conflagration Eugene leaped out upon the barricade, but as he thrust a bronzed face over the topmost trunk, another face was thrust into his from the other side, a brown-bearded, long-jawed plainsman's face, weather wrinkled and alkali seared, the yellowed teeth jarred apart in a triumphant grin.

"Mason!" exclaimed Joan Wayne in an odd, high-pitched tone.

"By the Doom—yes, Mason!" echoed her father.

And Carlisle, Drummond, Andrews, Missowa, and Waseyawin suddenly remembered him, one of the Missouri men, Wayne's brigade leader, whom they had last seen in the grip of the Northwesters as they dragged him and his companions off to the cellars of Grande Portage.

"Come on," implored Mason, frantically. "My pardners fired her back a bit to skeer them cusses off. 'Twas the only sartin way we seen. Come on. Ye kin run through her!"

The Missourian had an axe in his hand, and even while he implored he brought it into play upon the up-thrusting branches of the barricading trees, slashing a three-foot passageway down to the water level.

There was neither time nor need to cut the floating trunks. At a command from Carlisle the whole brigade swarmed out upon them, the six canoes were whipped from the water, passed through the gap, and launched on the other side.

"All aboard!" shouted Carlisle. "Now—wet blankets on your heads and paddle like very demons!"

He swiftly set the example, soaking a blanket overside and drawing it as a protecting canopy over the girl, the priest, and himself.

"That's the trick!" approved Mason who had tumbled in beside Wayne in Drummond's canoe. "'Twould be a turrible sin to scorch yon

ha-ar of Joan's. It's a short run, boys, but hot as Hades!"

Flying down stream into the face of the flame, the heat struck them with magnified force, like a searing furnace blast. Either bank was a moving wall of fire, sputtering and shrieking in a medley of impish voices: flare of dry leaves, crackle of underbrush, sizzle of green pine-needles, pop of resinous knots, crash of half-consumed stubs and the patter, plop, and hiss of embers ceaselessly raining upon shore rocks and river surface.

And all these lesser voices blended as separate notes into a symphony of vast volume, of awesome power, the Gargantuan roar of the fire giant bellowing a thunderous diapason.

Carlisle felt the blanket on his head grow warm and commence to steam. He breathed in gasps in the stifling heat and smoke, the blood pounding so hard in his head as to make him dizzy. He wondered if Joan would faint in that inferno, and he blindly put out his hand toward her to reassure himself. His fingers touched and closed on hers, burning fever-hot beneath the blanket folds.

"A moment more and we'll be through, Joan," he cheered.

Joan had one hand covering her mouth as an additional safeguard against the smoke, but her fingers tightened on his in answer, and the grip sent a fierce thrill through his frame.

"The deil!" boomed the cavernous voice of Lewis somewhere behind. "We're gaein' doon!"

At the cry Carlisle threw back a corner of the blanket in time to see Lewis' canoe disappear suddenly, leaving its four occupants swimming with the current. The terrific heat had melted the pitch on the birch-bark seams, letting in the water as into a sieve.

"Gae on," Lewis urged. "Dinna stop for us. It's muckle cooler swimmin'."

Before the man of the Hebrides and his Indians had taken a dozen strokes in the water, down went Hampton's canoe, and twelve heads now dotted the river surface, diving, reappearing, and diving again to escape the blistering breath of the flames. Lea's craft, waterlogged and careening, promised to follow suit, but Drummond's heavily laden canoe still flew like an arrow, and the Factor's canoe ahead, likewise heavily laden so that its seams lay mainly under water, traveled as yet unharmed.

Flying canoes and racing fireline were meeting at tremendous speed, but as if the fireline were standing still, the faster creatures of the forest broke from cover and passed the whizzing canoes. Like scurrying autumnal leaves the lesser birds flew through the rolling smoke pall.

Wedges of geese and ducks drove by on whistling wings. Coveys of partridges flushed with a drum-like roaring. Palpitant hares spurned the ground in fear-mad leaps. Squirrels chattering, demented, hurled themselves across the latticework of branches. The lordly caribou, antlers back and noses outstretched, crashed up stream like bombshells through the forest growth.

Amid a demoniacal tumult of earth and air they struck the fireline. A mass of blazing limbs whirled down and lodged on the bow of the Factor's canoe. Like tinder the dry birch-bark flared up, but Waseyawin, bare-handed, cast the burning débris off and with a scoop of his paddle dashed a gallon of water on the flaring bow.

The blaze sputtered out with a malignant hiss. The Cree dug in his blade, and the next moment the craft leaped out of the seething inferno into a strangely quiet reach of stream where the smoking, ash-filmed ground lay white as snow and the blackened trees slid by like spectres winking red-hot eyes at every puff of wind.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ILIAD OF THE FOREST

"JOAN, are you burned at all?" demanded Carlisle, throwing the half-charred blanket aside. "Scorched even? Hair—face—hands?"

The girl drew the sweet, smokeless air into her lungs with a gasp.

"No, Paul, no," she assured him. "The flames never touched me. Are you all right—and my father and Father Andrews and the rest?"

"All safe, apparently! There'll be singed heads and blistered skins for a while, but everybody's come through fine."

"Aye," murmured Father Andrews, "they have—by the grace of God."

"And Mason," supplemented Wayne from Drummond's canoe behind.

"By Jove, yes, by grace of Mason, too!" Carlisle lauded. "If it hadn't been for Mason we might not have tried to run the gauntlet."

"That's what I was thar fer, to give ye the word," grinned Mason. "Ye see, they had a celebrashun fer the McKenzies, McLeod, McDougall, and Richelieu when they left Grande Portage fer the Athabasky. Everybody got

roarin' drunk, and somebody left the bar off the door of our cellar.

"Thompson dropped a word about ye gittin' away, Wayne, with Hudson's Bay men bound into the Saskatchewan, so on course we got out of the cellar at dark and stole canoes, rifles, and grub to last and follered them drunk cusses up the Pigeon. We figgered yer party'd come in by the Kaministiquia, and we soon seen Richelieu figgered so, too. They travelled like hell-fire, aimin' to head ye off and git to the Winnipeg River first.

"They done it all right and barricaded her and lay by fer two days, and when they bushwhacked ye jist now we had to chase them with fire. She'll heel them miles back to the Pechilaux and Red Sand rivers comin' in on either bank. She'll stop thar, I kalkilate. Hullo! Thar's my men on the shore. Time, too, fer this cussed canoe's goin' down."

Lea's craft had already gone. Drummond's settled by the river margin amid all the swimmers from the other crafts, and all pulled themselves out dripping upon the ashy shore where waited Wayne's men of the Mississippi, men of the Missouri, men of the Red, along with his Stony Crees and Chippewayans.

Wayne stamped the water off as he made his way along the bank to the Factor's canoe, still sound and strong, where it lay grazing the river rocks.

"Well," he laughed, grimly, his fawn-green eyes glowing into Carlisle's where the latter sat

amidships, "fire is always a man's friend if it's properly used, and I guess it's my friend right here."

"You mean——"

"Of course I mean that. I'm the Big Chief now, and it's my turn to powwow. Your crew of six have their arms left. The arms of all the other crews are at the Winnipeg's bottom. You can't stand up against my thirty-two armed men. So tell your paddlers to step out with their hands up!"

"*Wilk! Wilk!*" Carlisle yelled, sharply, to his crew.

Swift as lightning they dipped their paddles in a terrific drive. The great canoe leaped its own length like a spurred horse and sheered off into mid-river.

"Stop!" Wayne bellowed. "Rapide des Boisfranc's just below. You can't run it. It's never been run. By the Doom, before you'll drown my girl I'll——"

He broke off to snatch a rifle from the hands of the nearest man and level it at the canoe.

"Carlisle—stop! Stop, or I'll shoot you like a skunk!"

But at the menace of the rifle muzzle Joan, sitting on Carlisle's left hand, sprang up as a shield between.

"Father, don't fire," she implored. "You forget—you forget!"

"I forget nothing. Sit down, girl—sit down, I say."

Joan did not sit down, but a lurch of the canoe

in the eddies set her swaying so that Carlisle pulled her down. The action put their bodies out of line where they sat, and instantly Wayne's rifle cracked. Carlisle heard the rip of the puncturing ball through the canoe from side to side above the waterline, and at the same moment he felt a solid blow, like the thud of a stone, on his left leg below the knee.

Blankly surprised, he looked down, to see the calf of his high-cut deerskin moccasin punctured from side to side as neatly as the birch-bark skin of the canoe. Blood was spreading over his leg and trickling down the creamy deer-skin to his ankle. Hastily he thrust the wounded limb under a dunnage bag before Joan should see.

Missowa twisted the stern and flung the craft cleanly across the river bend so that a rock shoulder intercepted Wayne's line of fire. They were round the bend, swinging into the grip of the powerful, tugging current writhing down to *Rapide des Boisfranc*.

Wayne's Free-Traders had hidden their own canoes in the forest below the rapid, ready for hasty flight when they crept up the shore to spoil Richelieu's ambushade. Now those in the racing Factor's canoe could hear them clamouring as they crashed along over the mile portage in a vain attempt to overtake the craft before it could reach white water.

"Oh, my father shouldn't have fired that way," censured Joan, still unaware of Carlisle's wound, "for he might have killed you, Paul! He's not himself. I swear he's not himself.

He's mad with an enmity I've never seen him hold before—with a hate that's quite beyond me!"

"I know," nodded Carlisle, turning a grimace of pain into a smile, "and you see how impossible it was for me to let myself be taken prisoner. I'm sorry, Joan, to have to hurl you through these infernal rapids, but it can't be helped now. We can't stop to land you. You'll have to hold on tightly and keep your weight as low as possible. Now, take your grip. Yonder's white water ahead!"

With terrific speed they were shooting down the black, ominous surges at the head of the rapids, surges twisting and writhing like a brood of mighty pythons between the crowding walls of rock. Fast as the river ran, the craft was running faster, flung bodily ahead of the mad current by the desperate paddles of Waseyawin, Missowa, and the four middlemen.

Not for an instant might they allow the river's velocity to approximate the canoe's velocity, because in that instant control would be lost to their blades and disaster ensue.

Half-a-dozen canoe lengths from the foaming snarl of white water the bowsman, Waseyawin, gave a high-pitched yell as a signal. At his cry the tremendous speed of the paddle-strokes abruptly doubled till it seemed some deep magic and not the skill of men which plied blades that the quick eye could scarcely follow.

The canoe was fairly torn from the suck of the dark water and launched like a meteor through

the white. Waseyawin gave another yell. As one man the four middlemen shipped paddles, leaving Waseyawin and Missowa, standing at bow and stern, to twist the huge craft this way or that.

Waseyawin, eyes focused on the moil below, read the river as white men read a book, and ever his high-pitched yells split the tumult of the waters, drifting back to Missowa in the stern, telegraphing him what lay ahead—tossing billow, seething white water, angry eddy, treacherous cross current, fountained spray that marked the jagged rock, or shallow foam that masked the sunken boulder.

Through a mist of flying drops they rocked over the edge of the cascade proper and plunged sheer down a milk-white chute as steep as a flight of stairs.

Nerved as she was by her father's training against all Northland menaces, Joan felt her spirit quaking at the sickening drop. Nausea dulled her senses. Terror gripped her heart. She shrank from the roaring, brutal maw of the river, shrank from its slaver and fangs, pressing tremblingly closer and closer to Carlisle.

"My God—my God," she quavered as they struck the base swells of the cascade with a tearing sound like the ripping of a thousand yards of silk, "are we gone, Paul?"

"No, Joan, we're all right," Carlisle soothed. "We'll go through. If I hadn't full faith in my Indians, do you think I would have risked it with you?"

He loosened his grip and like a child he drew her shrinking body into the hollow of his arms.

"I wouldn't have risked it, Joan," he declared. "I haven't found you that long to lose you so soon. Don't you understand, girl? Can't you realize what finding you back there at Grande Portage has meant to me?"

The frightened face upturned to his, the face blanched of its customary colour, lost the rigidity of terror, grew mellow, warm, sprayed with its crimson again, and her eyes deepened under some potent emotion to an amethyst shade. In the grip of the colossal elemental forces, heaving through a boiling caldron on the edge of death, her feminine finesse that under other circumstances would have kept him at bay, tantalized, in doubt, was torn away and to her lips of no denial Carlisle, on wild impulse, suddenly pressed his own.

A barrel of water shipped over the bow when the canoe buried its nose in the grand swell drenched them both as it rolled from end to end,

"Bail!" Carlisle commanded the middlemen.

With a mighty trembling the canoe shook itself free and, aided by the increased buoyancy as the shipped water was flung out, rose upon the silver-gray backs of the swells, tobogganed down a series of fluid terraces, and shot between two madly gyrating whirlpools studded with stump-like rocks.

Once more Waseyawin uttered a violent yell. The four paddles of the middlemen came down into the swirl, and though the giant tentacles of

the twin maelstroms gripped and tore at the craft like the arms of a gigantic devilfish, the added impetus carried them through.

They were in the leaping, lashing billows near the end of the rapids. A few more strokes meant calmer water, but squarely in the path showed a half-sunken boulder, round, wave-worn, dark-green in colour, standing like some Titan warrior of old taking upon his bruised face the eternal hammering of the river.

Swiftly Waseyawin jabbed his paddle deep under the bow to swing wide, but the already strained paddle snapped like a dead branch in his hands. The head of the canoe swerved back toward the rock. Missowa, the steersman, taking the opposite stroke to Waseyawin's, in the pivotal shift, could not throw the stern 'round far enough to clear, and before the middleman behind Waseyawin could hand him his paddle in place of the broken one, the craft reared upon the boulder.

A grating sound ran along the bottom, and the thin birch-bark heaved in the centre. All in a flash they lodged, whirled half-way 'round, were spewed off, to bring up with a drifting smash among a litter of granite blocks lying like thrown dice in the shore shallows. The canoe pitched on its side, spilling its occupants headforemost into the rubble-filled pools, and the first ones out of the tangle were Waseyawin and Missowa.

Crying to their middlemen to salve the canoe, packs, and arms, they rushed to the aid of the whites. Father Andrews, in water to his waist

and weighted by his soaked cassock, was slowly making his way ashore. Carlisle lay motionless in a foot of water, his head upon a stone, with Joan bending over him.

"He's stunned," she gasped as Missowa and Waseyawin reached her. "See the bruise there on his temple? His leg is hurt and bleeding as well. Carry him ashore quickly."

For answer Missowa whipped the gay sash from his waist over her mouth, while Waseyawin seized her wrists and tied them behind her back with the fillet from his head.

"Be quick, my Cree brother," urged Missowa, deftly knotting the gag. "The Free-Trading men must not find us here."

He pushed the girl up the bank in Waseyawin's charge and, exerting all his lithe strength, raised the limp form of the Factor and followed. Father Andrews splashed out on his heels, and after the priest ran the four middlemen, carrying the arms and packs and rent canoe upon their heads.

They left no dripping water trail if any one should search, for the rocks for yards around were wet with the spray of the rapids, and once off the rocks they staggered up the granite bed of a little spring that trickled the length of a deep ravine.

At the head of the ravine they clambered over lichened stones, dank moss carpets, and beds of fern as green as chrysoprase. Through the gloom of the pines, treading soundless as ghosts upon the fallen needles, they passed and came out on rolling ground forested with silvery birch.

They had worked over half a mile from the river, and in a tiny clearing Missowa let down his burden upon a bed of dry leaves. Waseyawin pushed Joan to a seat upon a mossy rock beside and, taking a rifle from the middlemen who crowded up, glided back to keep watch upon the river.

Father Andrews seized one of the packs and from it extracted the medicine kit he was accustomed to carry in his ministering among the Indians. It contained a flat tin flask full of brandy, and, using the screw-cap, the priest poured a few spoonfuls between Carlisle's lips and began to chafe him while Missowa cut away the water-soaked, blood-stained moccasin from his leg.

"A flesh wound," announced the Ojibway, unemotionally, baring the calf and manipulating the leg to feel for a break. "The bones are sound."

"That's good!" Andrews exclaimed. "I was afraid the jagged rocks had broken it clean."

"But, Ayumeaookemou (priest), it was not the rocks."

"Ah-hah! What then?"

"It was the Free-Trader's bullet, and had it not been for the twist of my paddle, it would have been though the Factor's heart!"

Father Andrews gave a startled exclamation. His eyes met Missowa's, fell to the bullet-torn limb, and then shifted quickly to Joan's face. He and Missowa had been talking in Cree, but he realized all at once that she understood the language. She could not speak for the sash over

her mouth, yet into her eyes flooded a silent eloquence, surprise, commiseration, anxiety—yes, something deeper, Andrews thought!

She rose from the rock. One of the middlemen made as if to stop her, but the priest shook his head, and she came and stood behind while they worked upon Carlisle. For nearly an hour they persisted before he showed signs of returning consciousness. Missowa had the leg bathed, the bullet-rip rinsed with pure water from a spring near by, poulticed with healing balsam gum brought from the ridge beyond the clearing, and all neatly bandaged before the Factor's eyes opened.

When they did open upon the mask-like mosquito veil of the priest, upon Missowa's swarthy face with the surface lights in the black eyes gleaming in solicitation almost akin to tenderness, upon Joan standing there in her gag and bonds, Carlisle felt himself still in the nightmare of the canoe smash.

"Wha—at—what under the——" he began in shaky syllables.

"Don't talk too loud," warned Father Andrews. "We're hidden here from the Free-Traders, and voices carry far in the forest."

"The Free-Traders are gone," spoke the voice of Waseyawin who glided like a wraith out of the gloom of the pines. "They came searching at the foot at the rapids. They found all our paddles, the nose-cloth of the Golden Daughter, and one pack that was washed away. It was the nose-cloth that set Shining Horns to weeping."

"They think the canoe sunk and all of us drowned?" demanded Carlisle.

"So," answered Waseyawin. "The grief of Shining Horns was terrible to see. I think he would have cast himself into the whirlpool had not others led him away. They dared not wait long, these others, for fear of the French Company's men behind. They went on with our own men as prisoners in their canoes, and it is well they went, because Black-beard and his followers came after. I waited to see if that would come to pass before I left my watch."

"Your eyes are good, my Cree brother," eulogized Missowa, "even as good as your paddle in white water. Now that Shining Horns and his men are gone Golden Daughter may be freed."

With deft hands the Ojibway unknotted the sash and whipped it back on his waist, at the same time handing Waseyawin the fillet for his head.

"Oh, my poor father!" cried Joan, tears in her eyes. "He'll be half-crazed. And Richelieu may catch him yet upon the river."

"How much start had he, Andrews?" asked Carlisle.

"About an hour," informed the priest.

"Then Richelieu won't catch him, Joan," decided the Factor. "Once warned, Wayne is not the man to be overtaken. He'll have a scouting craft out behind his brigade. If hostile canoes are reported, he can leave the river the same as we did. So don't worry. Your father

will be safe, all right, and we'll bring you back to him as sound as ever at Sturgeon Lake."

"But yourself, Paul," she burst out, impetuously dropping to her knees beside him, "your own hurts——"

"I'm all right," checked Carlisle with a smile. "There's nothing the matter with me but a good headache and a gash in the leg that a spiked branch might have made."

"Yet how can you forgive me my father's intent?"

"You know why, don't you?" he murmured so low that the others could not hear. "Besides, he fired out of desperate fear for you, as any one—as I myself would have done. Don't you worry, girl, but hurry and dry your clothes. The Indians will have a shelter ready for you in a few minutes. Missowa, Waseyawin," addressing his familiars, "bid the middlemen make three bough camps and small fires in front that will not smoke above the tree-tops. Also gather and cook the evening meal."

Very soon the shelters were ready and occupied one by each of the three whites, shelters consisting simply of circles of forked saplings thrust into the ground like teepee poles, overlaid with balsam boughs and floored with the same. In the opening glowed heaps of charred fragments taken from blackened tree trunks and stumps, the remains of former forest fires.

In the central space of the clearing Waseyawin had kindled another cooking fire. Missowa had taken the middlemen off to set a length of gill net

in the river and hunt the evergreens for grouse. Presently these returned with both finned and feathered game, several giant trout and pickerel and half-a-dozen partridges knocked from their roosts by sticks.

The delicious odour of crisping fish, of broiling partridge, of baking bannocks, of simmering tea, filled the camp space, drifting tantalizingly upon the evening breeze. With magical celerity a home-like atmosphere had been created in the midst of the wilderness, and the tiny clearing hard by the pine gloom and walled round with the creeping dusk took on the well-defined air of ancient use.

Lying in their shelters the whites ate their meal while they dried their steaming clothes, and once they were done with the serving the canoe-men squatted by themselves, bending over the kettles and pots of the central fire, their red-bronze frames and swarthy faces touched carmine by the flamelight. Hungrily they ate and lighted their pipes, Missowa delaying long enough to bring Carlisle's own pipe to his teepee.

"Here is dry tobacco, Factor," he announced, "and the steel that makes the fire (flint and steel)."

"Put them there," directed Carlisle, "and, Missowa, have the middlemen whittle out new paddles, weaving woollen streamers for them from the ball of wool you will find in the pack. Also, see that the canoe is mended with care. We start on at dawn."

When the Ojibway had gone back to the fire

to set the middlemen at their tasks, Carlisle filled and lighted his pipe, ecstatically savouring the tobacco's perfume and the other camp fragrances that stole so familiarly into his nostrils, the supper scent, the pungent wood smoke, the spice of balsam and pine, the resinous pitch the Indians were melting, the steam of human garments.

For it was ever at such moments as these that the incomparable thrill of the life in the wild rushed over him in a surge of joy so fierce as to be akin to pain. Here men lived, he exulted! Here was no cramped, purposeless existence, no desk-bound slavery such as he had come to visualize in his four years of London. This was the epic life, the Homeric essay, the Iliad of the forest!

Dreamily his eyes and his soul and his senses lapsed, and before he was aware his hand slipped limply from his pipe and the pipe fell from his lips. The night crept on. The young moon showed for a little over the balsam ridge, bathing the forest like a radiant mist, glowing through the latticed branches, checkering each clearing in silver and black, overlaying the ghostly birch trunks with luminous pearl.

The transient light filtered through Carlisle's bough shelter, touched his face, and receded again as the moon set behind the ridge. But neither moonrise nor moonset served to waken him. Still he dozed, till the slight scuffle of a moccasin stirred him.

Yet, true to his woodsman's instinct, he stirred inwardly, not outwardly, giving no muscular

response to the impression from without till he should have sensed whether friend or enemy wore the scuffling moccasins. His body retained its immobility. Only his eyelids parted, almost imperceptibly, till he could glimpse the fire-lit entrance where his mosquito smudge flared and smoked and hissed its defiance to the whining pests.

Then he saw in their dainty materialism the moccasins that had wakened him, two tiny creations of elkskin, like Cinderella slippers of the forest, so small that they could have walked upon his outstretched palms. They revealed the identity of his visitor. None but Joan wore such fairy footgear.

He shifted his furtive gaze upward, to see her swelling-hipped, full-bosomed figure silhouetted in the ochre glow. He could mark the wonderful fairness of her skin, the sparkle of the lake-blue eyes, the shimmer of her hair that gleamed like a frosted web of fine gold threads with every flare of the smudge.

"Paul, how does your wound feel now?" she asked.

Some sudden, unaccountable whim kept Carlisle silent.

Hesitatingly Joan stepped over to where he lay upon the balsam boughs. He seemed asleep, his eyelids closed. In the dim light of the interior she noted the bandage upon his stockinged leg and the discoloration of the bruise upon his temple, and a flood of mingled feeling rushed over her.

All in an instant she was swept and shaken by the romantic glamour of their first meeting that eventful night at Grande Portage, by the sweet companionship of their days of wilderness travel, by the passionate unbaring of Carlisle's heart in the wild dash through the Rapide des Boisfranc.

Standing over him, her own heart beat in a tumult, and though her intellect flashed a vague warning of restraint, it could not curb the impulsive surge of her emotion. Swiftly she stooped, pressed her warm lips to Carlisle's lips, and fled back on silent, winged feet to her own tent:

His fibres all a-throb, Carlisle opened his eyes. Instinctively his arms went out, but Joan had vanished too quickly. Like a wood nymph she had come and like a wood nymph she had gone, too ethereal for the human grasping.

All Carlisle's arms encircled was the empty air. All his wide-open eyes saw was the stoic Indians mending the six-fathom canoe. It lay on its side by the fire, one gunwale propped up with sticks, the yellow bark shining deep orange under the magic flames.

Over the rents Missowa and Waseyawin were fitting strips of bark while the middlemen poured on the resinous pitch. A study in red, yellow, bronze, crimson, umber, and orange they worked, ringed 'round by the velvet band of the forest starred here and there with the prying eyes of the watchers of the wild.

Carlisle followed the shift of the eyes un-

consciously, and by the eyes and the scurryings among the leaves he read the identity of each—a darting weasel or mink, a timid doe with her fawn, a porcupine running a log, a pack of full-bellied harmless wolves worming like dogs toward the fascinating glare.

And in the trees above he read analogous sounds, the feathered wild things of the air going abroad with their kin of the earth, the plaintive whippoorwill, the rasping night hawk, the hooting owl on its noiseless pinions. All the wilderness had awakened with the moonset. The susurrus of the pine sang overhead like passing winds, and winds themselves, arising no one knew how, dying no one knew where, came and went like unseen hosts on the march.

Beaver slapped their pistol-like warnings in the ponds below the balsam ridge. Bull moose called from the thickets beside. Never for a moment was the night-world still. Yet, buoying all these noises, Carlisle sensed an underswell of silence, the poise of the lonely land, passive, brooding, Nirvanic, the voiceless spirit of the North itself lying mute in its ambush, waiting to spring upon men in the unguarded moment of their weakness.

The pale yellow stars in the purple sky seemed planets appointed to another sphere, and the only gleam which showed in the dark, austere immensity of the earth itself was the fitful sweep of the aurora above the trees on the ridge and the phosphorescent smear of organic gases waving over the black muck marsh beneath.

Carlisle gazed at the pyrotechnic display till too-prolonged gazing began to produce internal flashes in his brain and he dropped his head for sleep.

All the rest of the camp slumbered save Missowa and Waseyawin, who before turning in with their fellows were sitting a moment by the fire pointing with the stems of their pipes at the aurora and the will-o'-the-wisps. They were talking in hissing, gurgling, lisping Cree, and the trend of their speech was the last sound to reach Carlisle's drowsy ears.

"Behold, my Cree brother," spoke Missowa, "there are the Spirit Lights in their summer garb, the souls of our forefathers rushing rank on rank into battle. For the dead die not, Waseyawin, but live to hunt and fish and fight again even as you and I shall do. Their robes of light and flashing spears are but signs for their children and their children's children here in the forest below."

"Ae, Missowa," nodded the Cree, "signs that we will follow when our last campfire is burned. But these others," indicating the dancing, incandescent will-o'-the-wisps, "we do not follow. For they, my Ojibway brother, are the lures of our enemies, of Shining Horns and his men. They think us at the bottom of the whirlpools, and these lights they have put out by magic to lead our drowned souls astray!"

CHAPTER SIX

THE DEAD ARISE

THREE hundred miles of headland-broken, island-studded, gale-thrashed, roller-raped Winnipeg lay behind, one hundred and more of the sinuous Saskatchewan, and at last through the long twilight of a Northern evening Cumberland House loomed up on Pine Island Lake, the western arm of the Sturgeon.

July had run out upon Lake Winnipeg where head winds held them behind sheltering points, where erratic squalls beached them upon stormy lee shores, where rain-choked gales flailed them upon barren islets, smothering any attempt at fire, levelling any attempt at shelter, roaring and ramping for five days at a stretch. It was the first week of August and the end of Carlisle's long journey from James Bay.

The end, and how familiar an end! His mind turned back to the time when he had sojourned here with Thompson long years before, planning and executing for the day of undisputed supremacy of the Hudson's Bay Company, and his blood leaped as he glimpsed the well-remembered log post buildings, the stout stockade, the tall flagstaff with the blood-red banner of his corporation flapping from its tip.

All about the stockade straggled Indian teepees of the tribes come in to trade. The smoke of many teepee fires spiralled through the dusk and a babel of noises rose from the camps, the guttural jargon of the hunters and squaws, laughter of the maidens, wails of papooses, shrieks of children at play, barking of mongrel dogs.

Suddenly these noises stilled! Men lining the stockade, standing upon the firing steps and leaning over the palisades, had caught sight of Carlisle's huge canoe. A voice commanded silence, and then with a surge a loud cheer burst from whites and Indians alike.

They recognized even in the dusk the Hudson's Bay flag in the canoe bow, the long gonfalon in the stern, the gaudy costumes, woollen streamers, slanting feathers that graced the canoemen of a Factor. Here then was the new overlord they expected—here was Carlisle of far Moose Factory!

The gate swung open swiftly, and a bare-headed, swarthy-skinned, heavily built half-breed came forward. Cree blood showed in his eyes and feature casting, and by these signs as well as by the description Eugene Drummond had given of him Carlisle immediately recognized him as Henry Galt, the chief trader who had been left in charge of the post awaiting his taking it over.

Son of one of the earlier white adventurers who had married among the Crees, Drummond had said, and now as he advanced with long, stalking strides he spoke a salutation in Cree.

"Welcome, Factor," he greeted respectfully, glancing the rest over with his black eyes but seeming not to see any other than his superior as he glanced. "You have had a hard journey I read."

"True, Galt, a hard one," returned Carlisle. "Through fire and flood on the rivers and storm on the lakes. But we are here at last."

"Ae, you are here, and it is good that your flag should float."

With his own hands, Galt took the streaming gonfalon from the stern of the canoe. It was soiled with river water, ripped by snags, scorched from the breath of forest fire, but these scars on the silk but lent it greater prestige. Proudly the chief trader carried it into the stockade ground and ordered the post banner lowered. Quickly he fastened the gonfalon on and bade the Indians haul away on the halyard.

As he emerged again the two banners rose to the staff tip, Company's flag and Factor's flag flying side by side. Another cheer rang from the palisade, and as Galt waved his hand the guns up-pointed and blazed in salute.

"Factor," spoke the chief trader in the oratorical manner of his mother's people, "I hand you over the post."

Carlisle drew himself up proudly upon the shore. The flesh wound in his leg had practically healed. He stood straight and strong.

"I take it from good hands, Galt," he accepted. "You I choose to retain as my chief trader. Eugene Drummond is my brigade leader,

and it is news of Drummond I want to hear now. Have you seen anything of him?"

"Three days ago Drummond came, he and other Hudson's Bay men I did not know, as prisoners among the crews of Wayne the Free-Trader. I had orders not to bother anybody till you came. I knew something had gone wrong, but I obeyed my orders."

An exclamation of joy burst from Joan. She seized Carlisle's arm with a little hysterical laugh, though the tears were in her eyes.

"He is here, Paul—he is here!" she exulted. "Richelieu didn't catch him after all. But I was so fearful, even though you were so sure!"

"Yes, it's good news for you," smiled Carlisle. "I thought Richelieu could hardly match him for woodcraft. And Richelieu himself, Galt," addressing his chief trader again, "what about him?"

"Four days ago the Northwester came," answered Galt, pointing where a scarce half-mile away Richelieu's post flying the Northwest flag showed vaguely in the deepening dusk. "In June he took the Sturgeon Lake brigades down to Grande Portage with furs. Now he comes with the winter supplies."

"I know," Carlisle laughed, grimly. "I met him myself at Grande Portage, also on the way into the Pays d'en Haut. And he arrived first, eh? A day ahead! You hear that, Joan? Your father gave Richelieu the slip by leaving the river as I imagined."

"Yes, yes, but take me to him at once," Joan pleaded. "You know he thinks I'm dead."

"In a moment," assented Carlisle. "Galt, order the men of the post to stand to their arms in case of trouble and you yourself go on and give the peace sign at Fort Wayne. I'll take my crew as bodyguard although I don't suppose that is hardly necessary. Ha—you, Father Andrews! Like an ungrateful boy I was almost forgetting you. Go on inside, Father, and take the freedom of Cumberland House till I come back."

"No, Paul, I'll go with you," decided the priest. "I like to be by your side in case of trouble to add my influence to your own."

"All right then, Father! Go ahead, Galt!"

Wayne's post stood as close to Cumberland House as Richelieu's. It, too, was less than half a mile away, although, close as the posts were together, it was no mystery that Carlisle had never seen Joan till he set eyes on her at Grande Portage.

It was many years since he was here with Thompson, and Wayne at that time was establishing other posts on the Saskatchewan's branches in territory far removed from Pine Island Lake. His Pine Island Lake post, only a trader's cabin in the beginning, had grown as his trade grew, and he had added to it piece by piece warehouse, fur house, spacious dwelling-house, all of logs, till his independent post under the Free-Trade flag was as large as that of either the Hudson's Bay Company's or the Northwesters'.

Only lately had he deemed it necessary to protect it in any material sense, increasing

friction with both companies compelling the erection of the palisade against which Galt now hammered.

"Who's that?" demanded the gatekeeper, peering through the gloom. "You, Galt? What d'ye want?"

But Galt, his open palm held out in the peace sign, was forestalled by the eager, excited Joan.

"Open the gate, Murdock, open the gate!" she commanded, peremptorily. "It's Joan. I want my father. These men are friends. Open quickly."

Like a man who sees the dead arise the gatekeeper obeyed, and Joan brushed rapidly past him, rushing at the head of the others, leading them through the yard toward the dwelling house.

The rough benches upon the long veranda across the house front were empty, but the door stood open, a yellow square of lamplight eddied through and through with blue tobacco smoke, and in the frame of the doorway as in a painted picture they could see a group of men inside, Wayne, Mason, and others lounging in chairs about a big table, conferring over papers, smoking long black pipes.

Joan sprang over the veranda and framed herself in the doorway.

Carlisle at her shoulder saw the faces of the men inside distorted by a colossal amazement, incredulity, and darkened by the sudden shadow of superstition which their wilderness natures could never wholly flout. He saw Mason's

brown-bearded, long-jawed face tilted back, the pipe poised in his hand, his yellowed teeth jarred apart, not in triumphant grin as he had seen it once before but in speechless gape.

Wayne himself, his pipe dropping on to the table, had risen from his chair to his great height, his features as impassive as carved mahogany but his fawn-green eyes blazing like molten disks. Such a look in any living eyes Carlisle had never seen. It approached most nearly the vision of the seer, the prophet, the vision that seems to pierce the gray rime of earthly things and behold the secret realms of another world.

"Verna! Verna!" he articulated in a whisper.

"No, no father, I am not my mother's ghost!" declared Joan, crying full-voiced, leaping full-blooded across the floor. "I am Joan, and I am not at the bottom of Rapide des Boisfranc. Oh, my dear—my dear, I'm sorry I've made you grieve!"

She was in his arms, impulsive, palpitant, moving, her wheaten hair mingled with his brown curls, her cheek pressing his like a rose petal lying upon an autumn-browned leaf. Abruptly Wayne's grim strength went from him. He trembled like the slim poplars on the wind-blown Saskatchewan hills and sagged back into his chair, his daughter on his knee.

"By the Doom, girl—by—the—Doom!" was all he could mutter.

"See, I'm a prisoner of war, father!" she laughed, gaily. "And I've come for exchange. You're to give Paul his twenty-five men in place

of me. Am I not worth it? Besides, I've promised him you would."

"Paul—Paul," stammered Wayne in bewilderment, "who——"

Then his eyes followed Joan's laughing ones to rest upon Carlisle gazing down the table length upon him. Though the Factor and the rest had entered on Joan's heels, Wayne saw him for the first time.

He had seen nothing before but the feminine vision of his dead, living again in his daughter's image, and now he leaped violently to his feet once more, pushing Joan aside into his chair as he leaped.

Carlisle saw that his eyes had their earthly focus back, bitter, implacable, savage, and in them he faced the terrible, lightning-like blaze of passion he knew so well.

"You, Carlisle," choked Wayne, "you dragged my girl by the brink of hell through those rapids and you dare to come and stand in my post afterward—you cursed spit of your drunken English father!"

"Stop right there, Wayne!" warned Carlisle, a wave of red anger surging over his own face. "For your daughter's sake I've taken a good deal of defiance from you. For her sake maybe I'll take a lot more. I can't say. But don't touch my father's honour with that reckless tongue of yours!"

"Touch his honour? I'll touch his very bones in his grave and make them writhe in shame! You saw her there in the doorway—

Joan? That was Verna—her mother—all rose and golden.

"That was how I saw her last the day of Major Butler's raid on the Wyoming. The day his Rangers—the cursed lusting hounds—came by, under Captain Charles Carlisle and Carlisle—the vilest hound of them all—struck her down in my own house while I was away!"

"You lie, Wayne! You lie abominably, devilishly! None but armed men were killed in that raid."

"So the ignorant tale-makers tell, but we who went through the fire and slaughter know better. We who lost our homes and our loved ones have memories that nothing can efface!"

"Andrews, Andrews," groaned Carlisle, his face whitened to an ashy shade under his bronze, "tell him he lies! You knew my father. You were his friend, and my guardian. Tell him he lies!"

"My God forgive me, Paul, but I can't," murmured the priest, catching him by the arm. "I know nothing but what Wayne has said and that the raid was made in liquor. Liquored men are madmen and their brains do not know what their hands are doing."

"And you knew, Andrews? And you never told me? But, high heaven, he was my father, my father!"

Reiterating the words, Carlisle stood gazing wildly across the table at Joan, staring into a face as pale as his own, into eyes as wide-set with anguish.

"And you, Joan, you knew——" he began.

"Only the—the—truth, Paul," Joan cried.

"My father never told me whose hand was in it."

"There was no need," snarled Wayne, "no need till now! Am I a liar, then, Carlisle? If you think so, go and ask Richelieu. I have no love for him at this late date, but he was once our friend, for he was as dashing an officer as one would find anywhere in those days.

"Simon Richelieu was a nineteen-year-old lieutenant then, officering what local force we had, and he was the one who took me home and showed me the crumpled, bleeding, breathless thing that war makes of woman! And, a few hours before, I had left her all rose and golden! By heaven, go and ask Richelieu, I tell you! He saw!"

"I—will—not," panted Carlisle in a passion of despair. "One word of Richelieu's corroboration and I would kill him!"

"By the Doom, you hold a tarnished honour brightly! It's well Charlie Carlisle fell on the Wyoming. It would have been better for yourself if you had never lived. When I drifted north from my homeless valley with my girl of four I swore an oath against the Carlisle breed, and by the grave that lies southward on Wyoming waters I will keep it! Now, go back to your post, Carlisle. Joan's word is mine. Mason will hand you over your twenty-five men."

The petrified Missourian sprang into life again, but the Factor did not move. He remained staring stupidly at Joan till the priest drew him

toward the door. Missowa, Waseyawin, and the four middlemen crossed the veranda ahead like gliding shadows, and like gliding shadows they mingled in the yard with Mason's muster of the astonished Hudson's Bay prisoners—Drummond, Lewis, Garry, Lea, Hampton, Jarvis, Wells, the James Bay Crees, Ojibways, Salteaux.

But of these Carlisle took no note. He walked unseeing, urged by the priest's hand, across the dark yard.

"Andrews," he burst out as they passed through the gate, "did my father know the district he was raiding?"

"Yes, Paul."

"The people?"

"Yes."

"The house?"

"Yes."

"Oh, my God—her?"

"Yes. I can't lie to you. You know I can't!"

"Did my father love her?" he blurted, harshly.

"For heaven's sake, tell me if he loved her?"

"Yes, he loved her," declared Andrews in a broken voice. "That much I know. When your mother died in the Niagara Post, Paul, his was a lonely life. He loved Verna Miller! Aye, and so did the stripling Richelieu, though Wayne won her from them both!"

Like lightning the significance of Andrews' words flashed home to Carlisle as he stumbled along the rough shore of Pine Island Lake toward Cumberland House. Before him was

more than the competition of three rival trading companies, more than the essay at empire of three rival corporations.

He was plunged into the tense struggle of souls in combat, all the wrongs of another generation crying for their righting, with the very spirits of the dead arising from the grave to claim that righting.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRADE WAR

SITTING around the counter of Galt's trading-room at morning, the Hudson's Bay officers leaped swiftly to their feet as Carlisle came in. All the sleepless night he had shut himself up in his council room, and now they hung upon his decision concerning the course to be pursued against Northwesters and Free-Traders alike.

"Is it war, Factor?" they chorused, eagerly.

The marks of sleeplessness and inner conflict showed upon Carlisle, pallor of skin under his bronze, dark circles around his eyes, a weariness in the gray eyes themselves, but he nodded with his grim smile.

"It's war," he announced, "perhaps in all its bitter phases, but a trade war first of all. It starts to-day, this morning, on the minute, and I've work cut out for each of you to do."

A murmur of approbation stirred the group. It was what they hungered for, action, strategy, blows, no doubt, in the end.

Carlisle took a map from his pocket and spread it open on the counter.

"Look," he urged, pointing, "get the situation fixed in your minds! Richelieu's post was the first post on Sturgeon Lake. Tom and Joe

Frobisher built it in 1772, and it was built in defiance of the Hudson's Bay Company's charter.

"That it has passed, since the amalgamation of the Montreal traders as the Northwest Company, into Richelieu's hands does not alter that fact. It's trading where the Hudson's Bay Company alone has the right to trade. Sam Hearne came up the Churchill in 1774 and masked it with this post, Fort Cumberland, but competition hasn't killed it—yet.

"Then, years after, Wayne buffaloeed his way in—a second poacher. Now, men, this Cumberland District is *the* district of the West. Who holds the Cumberland District holds the Saskatchewan, and who holds the Saskatchewan holds the West. You understand me?"

"*Oui*," nodded Drummond, emphatically, speaking for them all, "dey understand dat all right."

"So did our sleeping overlords on James Bay when they woke up," Carlisle went on. "That's why they sent Hearne up here. That's why they hurried other men in to build other forts, a perfect network of them from Hudson's Bay to the Rockies, from Athabasca Lake to the headwaters of the Missouri.

"Those forts will hold the West only if Cumberland House holds Sturgeon Lake. Because, you see, the Saskatchewan is the great highway from the Rockies, and Sturgeon Lake commands the water lanes to it on the east, the west, and the north. There's the point. It's the connection of the Northern lakes and rivers

here with the Churchill River that gives this place its strategic importance."

"Losh, yes, Factor," spoke Garry, "and what wass it you would be asking us to do?"

"I'll tell you in a moment. I just want to emphasize the danger. You know the strength of the Northwesters, and I can tell you in all confidence that the Government of Canada is pitted through and through with Northwest adherents. Where they are not actually shareholders in the company, they are in close relationship with shareholders.

"The Hudson's Bay Company is powerful in the Government ranks in England, but it is the Northwest Company which wields that power here. If we loose our grip, the Hudson's Bay Company may as well surrender its charter."

"The teevil!" exclaimed Lea, astounded, while all the men, suddenly smitten by the magnitude of their undertaking, exchanged glances of wonder.

"Into the hands of the Northwesters it will go," Carlisle declared. "And, without our opposition in the field, they will not be long in swallowing up the Free-Traders."

"Yer don't mean to s'y, Factor, that the Northwesters 'll stand supreme, do ye?" burst out Jarvis, the Cockney clerk. "Blimey if the men that's fought under the H. B. C. flag so long could stand that, ye know. And, s'elp me, wot is the territory of our charter? Ayn't it all the ground drained by the rivers wot run into Hudson's B'y?"

"Yes," smiled the Factor, "but that territory is tremendously big and vague, and its boundaries have never been properly defined. I have private information that the Northwesters will soon send an expedition over the Rockies to the Pacific. The headwaters of the Saskatchewan are by no means the limits of their ambitions and besides, the Free-Trade movement is to be feared as much as the Northwest advance.

"You know yourselves that Wayne has independent traders planted all over the West in his different posts. If both the Hudson's Bay and Northwest companies go down in a death-grapple the Free-Traders will step in and gather all the spoils of the West. Three strong companies are reaching out for it, and I tell you in all seriousness, men, that two of those companies have to be smashed before another summer."

"Then to the Dowl wi' the Free-Traders and the Northwesters alike!" cried Hampton, belligerently. "Our own territory be given us by old charter. Us comed out here under our company's flag, an' we ban't going to see un fall, I can assure 'e. You'm counting on we, I reckon, Factor, to hold un feet while you'm breaking un heads ope."

"That's it, Hampton," laughed Carlisle. "You five men must hold my lines of communication. That's why I brought you in. Our posts in the Norway House and York Districts have complete control. That makes everything safe from Lake Winnipeg to Hudson's Bay,

but between here and Lake Winnipeg you must hold the lines as I say.

"Galt and Drummond I keep by me, of course. Lea goes to the Nepowin, Lewis to the Pas, Garry to Moose Lake, Hampton to Chimawawin, Jarvis to Grand Rapids. You will keep your territory clear of interlopers, pay any price to get its trade, and await further orders from me.

"The summer ship from England will reach James Bay any day now, and the moment she arrives York boats are coming up the Hayes River from York Factory with reserve supplies of food and trade goods. You will hold these boats in relays at Grand Rapids, Chimawawin, and the Pas until I send for them. That's all, men. You start at once. Galt and Drummond will pick out small canoes, outfits, and paddlers."

In five minutes the fleet was afloat. No man other than those Carlisle had addressed had been told its mission or its destination, but conjecture ran rife through Cumberland House. The whites hazarded shrewd guesses concerning the Factor's plans, while the Indian tribe herded on the shore, jabbering and pointing at the canoes till they disappeared. From the doorway of Galt's trading-room Carlisle watched them go, and he had no misgivings as he watched.

He knew his men, their abilities, limitations, merits, and demerits as he knew his own, and even after they were gone he saw them still on his mental vision—Garry, the man of Inverness with his short, broad body, flaming red beard, and

whimsical face; Lea, the Cromarty youth with the brown handsomeness of the tall, young Highlander; Hampton, ruddy, fleshy, with his atmosphere of the freshly turned peat soil and his Devon speech; Jarvis, a bunch of wires and nerves reeling off his Cockney slang; and Lewis, aged, mountainous-framed, gray-haired and gray-bearded, craggy-featured as the Hebrides he hailed from.

They were all picked men, tried in the company's service. Carlisle had chosen them out of many on the Bay, and he knew they would not fail him. Wells, the South-of-England stripling, he had chosen for a different kind of work, that of secret service, and him he now sent out in another direction.

His destination was the Seepanock Channel, a short water lane connecting the Saskatchewan and its tributary the Carrot where they flowed almost parallel for a space. His mission was to establish a winter camp there and scout along it to prevent the possible attempt of down-coming brigades of rival traders to avoid Pine Island Lake and reach the Saskatchewan again far to the east of it.

As the crowd on the shore broke up with the passing of the canoes, Carlisle wheeled back to Galt's counter.

"Let me see your daybook, Galt," he requested.

He turned up the last entered page, the page of recent trade, and scanned the entries with a practised eye.

Upon the yellow leaves of the well-thumbed book the entries ran thus:

Son-of-the-Stars	10 beaver	10 skins	..(\$5.00)
Amiska	5 skunk	2 skins	..(\$1.00)
Running Moose	1 common red fox	1 skin	..(\$0.50)
	2 otter	8 skins	..(\$4.00)
Makwa	1 prime red fox	6 skins	..(\$3.00)
	1 cross do	7 skins	..(\$3.50)
	1 black do	12 skins	..(\$6.00)

The unit value was a beaver skin, chosen as something concrete that the Indian mind could comprehend in default of mathematics and currency tokens, and though the unit fluctuated in value with different posts it was worth, on the average, fifty cents. To the Indian his more valuable pelts were simply his beaver skin multiplied as many times as the post trader decreed.

In the entries Carlisle gazed upon he found few of the costlier skins, in fact few of any kind of skins, and he knew the reason. These were but the feelers, the first light skins of barter. Ever slow to bargain and anxious to obtain the greatest price for their catch, the hunters delayed, awaiting the coming of the new Factor in the hope that they might profit more.

But the amount of that profit they had never imagined even in their rosiest dreams, for now Carlisle tapped the daybook and gave Galt the chief trader a hitherto unheard-of schedule of prices.

"Double it, Galt," he ordered. "One beaver is worth two skins. Send out the word among our Indians and see that some of our Indians

mingle with Wayne's and Richelieu's to carry the news."

Immediately the word went out and trade began. The Indians swarmed into the yard and covered the trading-room floor. Tall, black-eyed, raven-haired, smoky-skinned, they stood gaunt of waist and sinewy of limb, clad only in deerskin trousers and moccasins. Galt took a bag of trade bullets to represent the beaver skins which they comprehended.

They laid down what they had brought. Galt gave them its estimated value in trade bullets. They traded the bullets back to Galt for whatever supplies they needed. Thus in wilderness currency they turned fox, mink, beaver, and other skins into flour, sugar, bacon, and other commodities.

"Nor do I measure my flour and sugar with my fingers inside the cup as the Northwesters and Free-Traders do," Galt encouraged them in their own language.

"Neither do I take more of your bullets than the value says. And I write no larger debt against you in the books than the just debt."

The trade grew brisk, and not with the Hudson's Bay Company's Indians alone but with the tribes the Free-Traders and Northwesters had won to their allegiance. Cotameg the Chippewa in Carlisle's service and others visited the teepees about Wayne's and Richelieu's posts, dropping news that sent the occupants of those teepees stalking over to Cumberland House.

At Richelieu's post Cotameg detached himself

from all the rest and performed another and unrehearsed act. By a circuitous route he worked 'round to the rear of the post and there, unmarked by any one on the Cumberland House side, signalled to a man on the palisades above. In a moment the gate opened, and Richelieu himself appeared.

"What is it, Cotameg?" he whispered.

"Quick! It is broad daylight, you must remember, and it would not do for us to be seen. *Mon Dieu*, no!"

"He has sent men to the Nepowin, the Pas, Moose Lake, Chimawawin, and Grand Rapids," the Chippewa spoke rapidly. "There is food and trade stuff coming up from James Bay. It will stay at the river posts till he sends for it. No one was to know, but I was hidden in the loft while they talked and I heard."

"*Bon!*" exclaimed Richelieu. "That is all, eh?"

"He has made two beaver the price of one beaver."

"*Ciel*, a trade war! Then come to me day by day, Cotameg. There will be things I must know. *Voilà!* Go back swiftly and secretly."

Nor was Wayne long in hearing the news from his own Indians, and that very morning he met the Hudson's Bay Company's challenge by advancing the beaver unit another skin. In the afternoon Richelieu was compelled to make it four skins, and that night Carlisle raised it to five.

Thereafter it was a colossal game of poker with beaver skins for chips and no limits but the topaz

sky overhead. Like the Northland princes they were the three played the game with mad persistence. Never for an instant, night or day, did trade slacken, for to slacken was to lose.

Carlisle, Galt, and Drummond worked in turn behind the counter while the Indians they dealt with traded and slept in relays or slept not at all. Such profit, the tribes well knew, could not last long. They availed themselves while they might.

Never had the stoic hunters been moved to such excitement. They stalked no more but ran violently from post to post, frantic for the highest bid. Around Wayne's or Richelieu's counter they would be swarming, trading greedily, when a fellow tribesman would rush in jabbering and away they would surge to Cumberland House where beaver was worth another skin. For never before had the Northland known the like, never before had the poverty-ridden Crees been possessed of so much wealth or revelled in so much luxury.

Now their costlier pelts came out, bear, lynx, wolf, wolverine, ermine, otter, marten, fisher, the prime red fox, crosses, silvers, blacks. Carlisle, Galt, and Drummond were pressed harder than ever, toiling in a sweat through the sweltering August days.

The trading-room was a-reek with the odour of fur. The teepees of the hunters were piled with debt they carried away from the store, pyramided with flour, sugar, tea, tobacco, bacon, beans. The hunters' squaws came likewise and had

their lords clutter them up with soap, ribbon, calico, velvet, thimbles, mirrors, beads, silk handkerchiefs, Balmoral skirts, huckaback towels, and a hundred other useless things. Gay as their squaws, these lords went about in Wincy shirts with castor-oil rubbed on their heads, gloating over the new capotes laid by for colder weather, proud of their bright axes, knives, brass-bound trade guns, and ammunition.

Much of the food they wasted in gorging feasts. Much of the ammunition they foolishly fired at marks. But, in Indian logic, what did it matter? By the end of the first mad week Carlisle, supreme in the field, had hammered the price of beaver to thirty skins.

Also by the end of that mad week Cumberland House was stripped of every article of trade goods, every pound of provisions. So, too, were the other posts, and the Factor congratulated himself and his men. He had won his game. It was what he aimed at. Too late Wayne had awakened to the cost of playing Northern poker.

The fort was out of farinaceous food, and he was forced to send messengers off into the forest for others of his independent posts to come to his aid with enough supplies to tide him over the winter. Richelieu, however, sent no messengers forth. He looked at the empty shelves of his post, shrugged his shoulders, and awaited Carlisle's next move.

It was Saturday night and the Factor, Galt, and Drummond with the volunteer help of Andrews balanced up the company's books. Be-

sides forcing the hands of their competitors in the matter of supplies, they had cornered the bulk of the furs. Galt's fur room was crammed with pelts.

It was true that they had paid five times too much for some of the beaver and other cheaper pelts, but they would make up that loss on the priceless skins like the black and silver foxes which all traders undervalued for the Indians. More than that, they had secured the trade, and the trade, in the Indian mind, was the psychological thing.

"But are you sure, Galt," asked Carlisle when they finished, "that all our Indians are in? None who got debt are missing off the books?"

"Only old White Loon, his two sons, nephew, and cousin," answered Galt. "They all lived in one family, and they're all just nicely over the smallpox. I got word of their coming in and stopped them up the shore by Carcajou Cove. They went into camp there. I made them throw away their furs but gave them value for them.

"I dumped new clothes, outfits, supplies, and everything for them on the shore and told them to strip and leave the old camp naked. They walked out bare as babes new-born and took the fresh stuff, and then I sent them back on their trap lines."

"That's good—you did right, Galt," commended Carlisle. "We want no infection here. And there are no others?"

"No."

"Then we'll close up and have a night's sleep."

"Ba gar, yes," yawned Drummond. "I'm dozin' in ma stride, me—snorin' ovaire de beaver packs everyw'ere. *Bon soir, messieurs.*"

He lurched off, staggering for sleep, and the others rose and followed.

"I'm glad you finished up before Sunday, Paul," observed Andrews, as they passed upstairs in the Factor's house.

"Oh, yes, Father! As you know, most of the Factors go on just the same with their trading or routing of the brigades, but I believe in resting as far as possible one day in seven. See you in the morning, Andrews, and hope I'll be up in time for your service!"

Sunday morning broke in a white lake fog, dank and woolly, but when Carlisle stepped out of his house he saw the sun sluicing away the fog with a flood of gold. He beheld the ordered march of the rollers, white wave crest behind white wave crest as far as the eye could reach, running beneath the fog drift, and the tops of the pine-clad islands lifting starkly above.

Andrews was already on the shore, taking his stand upon a huge rock that rose up like a giant altar, and whites and Indians from all three posts were blackening the beach, the bronzed, roughly clothed woodsmen, the smoky savages, the squaws decked in all their finery with new velvet moss-bags for their wailing papooses.

On this day of truce in their trade war the rival companies met on a common ground of worship, some out of genuine desire, others out of curiosity, more out of sheer idleness.

Richelieu himself arrived with his black beard newly trimmed and his resplendent uniform cleaned and polished. Despite the peaceful appearance of things he had a bodyguard along, and he chose his place on the other side of the throng from Carlisle, giving him, with exaggerated courtesy, his ramrod bow from the hips while the sardonic laugh of the devil lurked in his black beard.

For Wayne or Joan Carlisle looked in vain, and a disconcerting qualm disturbed him inwardly. All the busy week he had had no glimpse of her, and to-day he had hoped—but yonder! Was the flash of a woman's dress flitting over from Fort Wayne? He stared, and his heart leaped. It was Joan and she was coming alone. Gone were her trail garments, the gray wool canoe skirt and the mosquito veil.

She walked bareheaded, a jewel at her throat, clad in a clinging silk dress of champagne colour with new, snow-white doeskin half-moccasins peeping from underneath. A moment he drank in the vision of her, all unflawed fairness in the full blaze of the sun, all rose and golden as Wayne had said of her mother, before she sat down upon a boulder on the outskirts of the crowd.

With prayer and oration in Cree the brief service went on, Andrews towering in his black cassock upon the rock altar above his motley congregation, his strong voice sounding sonorously from the waterline to the rim of the large gathering. To the cadences of the waves breaking upon the beach and the breezes playing

through the pines they sang their hymns, chanting in many languages, crying to their divers gods.

Then with a benediction Andrews dismissed them, and the adherents of each post began to gravitate slowly toward their own precincts.

Carlisle, watching, saw that Joan did not go back directly. As if loath to leave the fresh sweetness of the morning, she slipped from the crowd and loitered up one of the forest aisles between Cumberland House and Fort Wayne. For a moment he hesitated, made as if to follow Andrews inside the stockade, and then turned off up the ferny avenue Joan had taken.

A little farther on he caught sight of her wandering amid the jumble of rock ridges and grassy hills that fringed the woodland. All the hollows were splashed with the hue of berries, red raspberries, golden gooseberries, blueberries, the profligate wild black currants. All the hills were ablaze with flowers, waves of bluebells, tangles of wild pink roses, patches of vivid lilies, a largess of yellow daisies running riot everywhere.

Joan was idling along, bending here and there with the supple ease of the wilderness trained, gathering what pleased her fancy, but at the sound of Carlisle's feet in the briers she whirled swiftly, poised at her full height in the fashion she had inherited from her father.

In a flash Carlisle sensed the change in her! She was the same yet not the same woman as before her father's revelation the night of their arrival on Sturgeon Lake.

That revelation seemed to have thrown her back on herself, stamped her more definitely as a Wayne. In the very accentuation of her father's mannerism Carlisle read a strengthening of her loyalty to that father, and deep loyalty to Wayne could mean nothing but deep antagonism to him.

With something of the same feeling he had experienced when he feared she was going to be absent from the congregation of the Pine Island Lake shore, he stopped before her without a greeting, searching her face with his eyes.

"Paul, Paul," she cried, peremptorily, first to break silence, "who gave you leave to follow me here?"

"Nobody, but I took it," he answered, boldly. "I took it, as men must always take the things they want in this Northland."

"But you had no right!"

"Ah, but I have the right! A wood nymph came to me one night on the Winnipeg River and gave me that right. Do you remember?"

"No, I don't remember."

"Joan, you mean you don't choose to remember."

"Well, then—I don't choose to remember!"

Face to face with him she stood, defiant, imperious, her arms full of the gathered wild flowers but shaming the flowers in all their fairness, far sweeter to Carlisle than the honeyed blossoms, far more haunting than the languorous perfume they breathed.

"But you must. Joan!" he cried, almost

fiercely. "You don't hate me. In spite of all, you don't hate me."

"There you're wrong," she flashed. "I do hate you. I hate you with my father's hatred of your father, with his eternal loathing of a Carlisle."

He leaned over till his eyes were close to hers, till he could catch every flicker of expression, every shade of emotion.

"With his hatred," he admitted, triumphantly, "but not with your own! Great heavens, Joan, I showed my feeling in the Rapide des Boisfranc, and you showed me yours in the teepee in the forest when you thought I was asleep. No—no—don't say you didn't. You can't deceive me. I won't take a thousand denials. You're acting—acting a lie for your father's sake. By the God of the Northmen, girl, you care!"

"No! no! no, I don't!"

He laid his palms on the arms that hugged the bunch of tangled flowers.

"You care!" he repeated, chokingly.

"No, Paul, I——"

The rest was lost in the swift sliding of his palms to her shoulders and the swifter crushing of herself against his great frame.

"Stop, Paul, stop!" she implored, her face like a wild flower all sprayed with crimson among the crushed roses. "The blood of my mother stands between. And my father forbade me even to meet you on the trail. Let me go. If any of his men should come by and see!"

"They'd see the truth, for you're living a lie,"

he passionately persisted. "Tell me it's a lie!"

His caress was the elemental, soul-shaking caress that had swayed her in the caldron of the rapids, and with a little cry, Joan involuntarily tightened one arm upon his shoulders.

"Yes, I lie—I do," she panted. "And I shall go on lying—for my father's sake, for my dead mother's sake. I shall hate you day by day. Let me go! Here, take the flowers, the bluebells for my eyes, the daisies for my hair, as my father says.

"They're all you'll ever have of me. Take them. And, oh, Paul, no matter how I hate you, how I hurt you, remember that I lie! There! There! My God, what have I said—and done?"

She had forced the crushed flowers into his arms and, writhing free, darted through the saskatoon bushes into the fringe of trees that straggled 'round to Fort Wayne.

A radiant light on his features, Carlisle looked down at the crushed, tangled armful of flowers she had left him. His vision was blurred, and he seemed to see them as her palpitant self, her longings crushed like the bruised petals upon her vow of parental devotion. He held the blooms tight as he moved away along the grassy hills, through the hollows and over the brake of fern to Cumberland House, and continually his eyes strayed to his fragrant burden.

Lounging in the gateway of the stockade Galt and Drummond saw him coming and stared their surprise.

"Ba gar, w'at's dat he be got, Henry?" demanded the brigade leader.

"Flowers of the hills," replied the keen-eyed half-breed.

"*Certainement*, dat's right! Ha! Factor, you be peeck de bouquet for de post dis mornin', eh?"

Carlisle looked up, startled.

"Oh—ah—yes, Eugene!" he returned. "Th' hills are covered with them. Did you ever see such shades? But they wilt quickly. And say, now that I think of it, is Cotameg about?"

"De Chippewa canoeman? I'm t'ink he be gone on de *lac*. *Oui*, I'm remembaire heem say he be goin' after w'itefish."

"Well, when he comes in, send him to me. I have a journey for him this afternoon."

"*Oui*," assured Drummond, "soon's I be set eyes on hees canoe!"

The Factor passed on through the gate and up to his house, and the moment his back disappeared Eugene grasped the half-breed chief trader by the arm.

"You be see it, Galt?" he chuckled.

"No," confessed Galt whose sight had failed him for once, "see what?"

"He peeck dem, eh?" Eugene laughed, enigmatically. "For sure he peeck dem. An' you ain't see it? Ba gar, wound 'round de stems—forgotten? Wan dainty handkerchief, silk, all ovaire dat stinky smell—w'at you call it?—*oui*, perfume! *Diable*, Galt, an' dat's strange flowaire for grow on de wild rose bush!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PRICE OF A KISS

AT THE moment Eugene Drummond was speaking of Cotameg as having gone on the lake, the Chippewa's canoe was turning into Carcajou Cove up the Pine Island Lake shore not a great distance from Richelieu's post. As Cotameg softly beached his craft over the rough shingle, the Northwest leader stepped out of the trees with a companion, a slim, smooth-cheeked Frenchman with a pointed moustache and a large hawk nose.

"He is here, Dentaire," observed Richelieu with satisfaction. "*Par Dieu*, never failing, never late—a spy of spies! *Comment?*"

"Yes, but what are you thinking of?" asked Dentaire.

"Wait and see what I am thinking of, Dentaire," laughed Richelieu. "Ha! Cotameg, what fable did you give this morning?"

"I am seeking whitefish," replied Cotameg without the trace of a grin, "and it will not do for me to be too long away. Also, I must not go back without some fish."

"All right, Cotameg, go on through the woods to the post. Robouix will give you money for your work, also rum, since it is a slack day and nothing to do."

With alacrity the Chippewa spy sped off through the trees, and the instant he was gone Richelieu seized upon the limp dunnage sack in the canoe, the sack which contained his meagre gear.

"Now, Dentaire, you will see what use I make of this *très vite*," he announced.

He shook the contents of the dunnage sack out into the underbrush and with the empty bag over his arm led the way a little distance 'round the curve of the cove and through the woods. Three hundred yards in, the deserted camp of White Loon, the smallpox-ridden Indian, and his relatives opened out before them, and Dentaire suddenly realized where he was being led.

"*Bon Dieu !*" he ejaculated and crossed himself in the trail.

"*Diablement*, Dentaire," ridiculed Richelieu, "are you afraid of an old teepee?"

"*Bon Dieu !*" repeated Dentaire, shivering, "teepees which chill one's heart!"

"Bah!" shrugged Richelieu. "They don't chill my heart."

He walked fearlessly through the ashes of the camp-fire, kicking aside discarded cooking utensils and other paraphernalia, and peered into the opening of the torn skins that covered the teepee poles.

His examination seemed to satisfy him, for, hanging the sack open-mouthed upon one of the poles, he picked up a long stick and began to fork into it things from the dark interior, worn moccasins, soiled trousers of buckskin, the dirty

parflèches or bed-rolls, while Dentaire, staring at him with horrified eyes, trembled and crossed himself and called incessantly on Providence.

"*Mort Rouge*, the Red Death, the Indians call it," grinned Richelieu as he pulled the bag down by the drawstrings in its mouth, jerked the strings tight, and started to drag it behind him. "But never fear, Dentaire. This is not for you, though Providence would no doubt defend you from the plague with all that beseeching. It is for the men of the Hudson's Bay."

"And, *bon Dieu*, does Cotameg know?" quavered Dentaire, taking frantic care to keep ahead all the way back to the cove.

"No, you fool! Cotameg knows nothing about it. If he did he would be like you. *Ciel*, he would run or drop the bag in the lake. Since he knows nothing he will go back and throw the bag down as usual in Cumberland House—like I do now!"

With a tug and swing on the drawstrings Richelieu tossed the dunnage sack carelessly into the canoe bow.

"With never a touch of my hands!" he boasted. "But calm yourself, Dentaire, and quit your crossing. I think I hear Cotameg coming back. See that you give no suspicion to him."

Shortly the Chippewa appeared, walking more noisily, with less of his stony stoicism what with the rum with which Robouix under Richelieu's instructions had plied him. He had half a dozen whitefish in his hands, and, grinning, he held them out.

"Robouix's men caught many to-day," he explained. "And I have wasted time. These will save me time."

"Yes," Richelieu nodded, "take them quickly. They will not starve to-day at Cumberland House. And when the Factor sends for his supplies, do not fail to give me word or sign."

Cotameg threw the whitefish into the stern of his canoe, paddled out of Carcajou Cove, and swung back to Cumberland House. He had been absent the greater part of the morning. Several times Carlisle had asked Drummond if he had returned, and now as his craft came in sight, the brigade leader went up to the Factor's house.

"De Chippewa be comin'," he informed.

"All right, Eugene. Bring me Smoking Pine to the beach. I am sending the two of them to the Pas for foodstuffs. I don't like the post to be too long on a straight meat diet. It breeds disease."

When Eugene found Smoking Pine, Carlisle followed them down to the shore where the Chippewa was edging in his canoe.

"You needn't trouble to land, Cotameg," the Factor told him. "Your being away has made your start late. Step in, Smoking Pine. No—keep the fish. They'll make your first meal, for you'll have to feed yourselves on the way. Go to the Pas. Tell Lewis to send on the York boats from his post. If the boats aren't there, wait for them, and see that there is no delay on the river."

Though the rum was in his veins, Cotameg had wisdom enough to show no concern. He grunted comprehendingly and dipped his paddle in time with Smoking Pine's as the canoe glided off, but a mile or two upon his way he stopped for the noon meal just near one of the secret rendezvous that he and Richelieu had picked upon to obviate the risk of his visiting the Northwest post too often.

There they roasted some of the fish on sticks, and there Cotameg lagged behind Smoking Pine a moment before he stalked down to the canoe to reëmbark.

With his knife he blazed a white space upon a tree trunk in the secret rendezvous and with a piece of charcoal from the fire smudged on it the sign for Richelieu—a crude drawing of a full flour sack labelled H. B. C.

Nor was the departure of Cotameg and Smoking Pine the only departure from Cumberland House that day. After the mid-day meal, seemingly without fore-thought, without any definite plan, the Indian hunters took down the medicine bags from the rear of their teepees and the squaws struck the tents.

The tribes 'round Richelieu's post and Fort Wayne perceived the exodus and followed suit. The littered camp grounds became a chaos and a bedlam of bucks, squaws, children, and dogs, but finally the ruck was straightened out, the baggage bundled and apportioned, the papooses and curs sorted, and the pilgrimage began.

Their destinations were many, the up-Sas-

katchewan country, the down-Saskatchewan, the Sturgeon River, the Carrot River, the eastern and western arms of Sturgeon Lake, Lakes Namew, Amisk, Goose, Athapuscow!

Some went afoot on the forest trails, their worldly goods piled upon their shoulders and their dogs back-packed with forty pounds apiece. Others travelled by canoe, the glistening yellow craft loaded to the gunwales with heterogeneous dunnage and the dogs thrust under the thwarts.

The serried hosts of the forest trees swallowed the files of marchers more quickly than the sweeping phalanxes of the crested waves could hide the fleets. From the doorway of his house Carlisle watched the familiar sight. They were going back, these children of the wilderness, to their wilderness crafts, to their fish channels, caribou runs, and trap lines.

They would travel from fifty to one hundred miles from Cumberland House, planting their marten deadfalls, their double-spring fox traps, their twitch-up snares for rabbits through a waste of frost and snow, and he would see none of them again till Christmas.

With a strange sense of loneliness he held them to the last with his keen eyes, till the straight backs of the hunters, the bright shawls of the squaws, the warm yellow of the birch canoes faded beyond the heaving silver rollers.

A fortnight passed after their departure, and there was no sign of the York boats at Cumberland House. The month of September came in, and still Carlisle felt no uneasiness. For Cota-

meg and Smoking Pine had to go down 'round the Great Bend of the Saskatchewan, beyond the mouth of the Carrot to the Pasquia River where the post of the Pas lay in the crotch the Pasquia formed with the Saskatchewan.

Perhaps the supplies had not reached Lewis when they got there! Perhaps on account of pack ice or shifting shoals in James Bay the company's ship had not been able to get in on schedule, and there might have been delay in sending the York boats up from York Factory.

So the Factor waited philosophically, living like the rest of the men of the post, and the rival posts as well, upon a straight meat diet varied a little by berries from the hills. Daily they plied the rifle and the net, bringing in the first fall ducks, ptarmigan whose brown summer feathering was whitening for winter, finny prizes from the cool deep waters, whitefish, inconnu, silvery trout as big as salmon, sometimes a weighty sturgeon.

Surplus fish, especially the whitefish, were dried for winter dog feed, and when the nets yielded nothing the canoes went out at night with spearmen in the bows, bronze statues posing under the red flares in the iron baskets above them, darting their steel into the pitchy, flame-carmined water where the startled fish fluked in phosphorescent streaks.

Bird life, too, was flocking for the fall migration. Plover, snipe, terns, long-billed marsh wrens, yellow-headed blackbirds, red-winged blackbirds, Sora rails filled the reedy labyrinths.

Wood duck, ruddy duck, grebes, loons, coots, mallards, black duck covered the weedy channels, while day by day the rafts of gadwall, pintail, teal, scaups, scoters, redheads, canvasbacks grew greater and greater.

Then down drove the wedges of wild geese, true harbingers of coming winter, the Canadas from Hudson's Bay, the wavies from unknown islands of the Arctic. Every day from sunrise to sunset the guns of the Indian goose hunters talked on the lonely shores, and by the hundreds they brought them in, to be eaten fresh or salted down in barrels for winter use.

But white men quickly sicken of flesh alone and white women more quickly than men, and often Carlisle wondered how Joan was faring on the savage diet. He had not seen her since the Sunday morning she had fled from him. Her flowers were withered and dead, but he looked in vain for another meeting. All the week days there was practically no communication between the posts and on Sundays she never came any more to Andrews' mixed services on the lake shore.

He wondered if she were ill, and censured himself for pressing the trade war so bitterly. Would Wayne perhaps save some staple provisions for such an emergency? But on second thought he knew Wayne was not the man to hedge in a fight. She would be living on the post diet, and he feared it did not agree.

The idea harassed him continually, set him searching at nights for overlooked food among

the shelves of his quarters till one night he came across his gear bag, thrown aside and forgotten since he had established himself at the post.

In its bottom his groping fingers felt a bundle which he did not recognize at first but as he unrolled the oilcloth in which it was wrapped he suddenly remembered about it. It was a small reserve of provisions, stowed away there when he left Moose Factory in case of accident or emergency on the trip to Cumberland House.

Eagerly he spread out its contents and eyed the articles with satisfaction—a tiny bag of flour, the same of meal, a tin of salted butter, a package of raisins, a little powdered chocolate. Delicacies for any one in the North, a boon to Joan whether she was sick or not! And who was to see him if he tossed them by night over the palisades of Fort Wayne?

Hastily he wrapped them up again in strong paper, wrote Joan's name on the wrapper, slipped out of his house and through the stockade gate.

The moment he left the stockade he caught it—the first tang of real autumn, that indefinable feel in the air, something of coolness, something of dampness, a savour of falling leaves, white frost fogs, mournful winds, and a world left desolate by fleeting migrant wings. The moon was nearly full, ghost-like, gibbous, pouring its radiance over the blackly silhouetted tree-tops upon Pine Island Lake beneath.

A flux of molten silver Carlisle beheld the waters, broken only by the swimming muskrats

at the apices of their V-shaped ripples along the shores and by the huge rafts of ducks, huddled black as islands, quacking sleepily in mid-lake. Shore and open forest aisles were bright as day, so the Factor edged into the trees and kept the shadows as he worked round to Fort Wayne.

Velvet-footed on his moccasins he approached the palisades, maintaining a sharp watch for riflemen who might fire first and challenge afterward, measuring his distance till he thought he was near enough to throw. As he swung back his arm, the creak of the opening stockade gate froze him in his tracks, and the next instant a woman's figure came flying round the palisades on the trail that led to the water's edge, almost colliding with him before she could come to a stop.

"Joan!"

"Paul!"

"Where on earth were you going, girl, at this time of night?"

"Hush, Paul!" she whispered. "Murdock, the gate-keeper, or some of the others may hear you. What on earth are you doing yourself, here, under our palisades?"

"Tell me where you were going, first," he insisted.

"I was going to the lake. I—I have not been feeling too well lately!"

"Ha, I knew it! It's the meat diet. I found some other food in my packs and was going to toss it over for you. Here it is."

He thrust the package into her hands, his eyes full of tender solicitude as they studied her face

in the moonlight, a face not so full of its laughing curves, not so rose-fresh in colour as it should have been.

"You've been sick, sicker than you've admitted," he diagnosed.

"I've been worrying—that's the main trouble," she told him. "I'm all upset. It's about my father, Paul, his supplies. He got word back from the independent posts, and none of them can spare anything. They've had their trade wars, too."

"Of course!" Carlisle exclaimed. "You didn't suppose mine was an isolated attempt, did you? The Hudson's Bay Company's making a timed and concerted effort all over the West to smash competition with one stroke, and the key point of the whole campaign lies right here. That's why it pinches hardest. If I fail, everything fails."

"By heaven, Joan, do you think I carry my responsibility lightly? Do you think it's easy for me to starve you, to make you suffer? But, girl, you won't force me to that cruelty, will you? Tell me, if things come to the worst, that you'll persuade your father to give in."

"Never, Paul, never!" she refused, passionately. "Before you break his independence, you'll have to break him—and me!"

"Ha, you mad girl! Then if you will face hunger, you'll have to let me send you stuff like that in your hands."

"Perhaps, Paul—that is, if you have it to send," she smiled, enigmatically.

"What does that mean? Is it a riddle? Do you promise?"

"I'll give you my promise if you give me yours."

"But there's no necessity for me to promise. Are you laughing at me, warning me, or——"

He stopped in mid-sentence, twisting his head swiftly at the roar of a wild commotion at Cumberland House. He caught the thud of moccasined feet running and the shrill tenor voice of Eugene Drummond pitched on the night:

"Factor, Factor!" he was yelling. "*Mon Dieu!* w're you be disappear an' gone den? De York boats be on de shore an' dere's *diable* trouble makin'. Fur men fightin' de crews an' Smoking Pine be run for help! Factor—Factor!"

"Here, Eugene!" roared Carlisle, forgetful of Murdock or anybody else. "I'm coming!"

As he whirled about he found Joan blocking the trail, the moonlight glinting on a pistol in her hand.

"Stay right where you are, Paul," she commanded.

"Joan—your father's men!" Carlisle exclaimed intuitively.

He leaped suddenly, making a swift pass with his hand to grasp her arm, but, agile as a fawn, she sprang back and evaded him.

"Paul, I'll shoot," she threatened. "As sure as I hold it, I'll shoot!"

The pistol muzzle covered him fairly, daunting, deadly. For a minute or so Carlisle hesitated, searching her eyes for any sign of uncertainty, of yielding, but he read only determination there.

A will that matched his own she showed, and its antagonism fired him with a sterner resolve. With a lightning movement he launched himself bodily upon her, pistol and all. He had her grasped by the shoulders, but the weapon touched his breast.

"Paul," she cried, breathlessly, "don't make me——"

Then in the crucial moment her will failed. With a little cry of despair she thrust the weapon back into her pocket and swept her arms about his neck.

Carlisle's strong frame trembled from head to foot. For mad moments he knew nothing there in the trail, saw nothing but the spun-gold hair, the amethyst eyes, and the passionate face touched to his under the moonlight—till through the cloying sweetness of his oblivion rang the raucous clamour of men fighting on the shore. Her arms still clinging, he tore himself free and dashed back toward Cumberland House.

As he reached the stockade gate out shot Eugene Drummond, his raven hair dishevelled and streaming, his volatile face ridged in consternation, and his black eyes glinting fire in his excitement.

"Name of *le diable*!" he shouted. "I'm be hunt you everyw'ere, Factor. Smokin' Pine——"

"I know," blurted Carlisle, guiltily. "I heard you. Come on. Have you routed out the men?"

"*Mon Dieu, oui!*" exploded Eugene, catching him by the arm. "Some in deir shirts half-

naked, some snorin' in peeg sleep. An dose York boats' crews fightin' off t'ree taims deir number!"

The rest of his frenzied declamation was lost upon Carlisle, who, tearing his arm free and distancing Eugene, was bounding down to the lake edge in great, long strides. Already he could see the York boats, three in number, sweeping-lined, long-prowed, eight-oared crafts, so huge as to be capable of holding one hundred bags of flour.

They lay black as logs along the shore, and over them, poised on the gunwales, running along the seats, trampling the cargoes, raged and surged a mob of fighting men. Even at that distance the Factor recognized the attackers as Free-Traders, Wayne's men of the Missouri, men of the Mississippi, men of the Red, all mingled with his Cree and Chippewayan Indians.

He sawt he brown-bearded, long-jawed Mason war-whooping his way through his opponents, and in the centre of the *mêlée* he caught a glimpse of Wayne, towering to his great height, his copper-coloured moustache flashing golden in the moonlight as he wrenched and struck.

The York boats' crews fought back with the oars and the long poles they had used for poling up the rapids, but Wayne's force was too large for their meagre numbers. Before Carlisle could reach the waterline the Free-Traders had swarmed over the York boats from stern to prow, pulled, dragged, knocked the crews over-side into the shallow water and seized the oars.

Then, under the Factor's astounded eyes, another force struck the victors like a thunder-bolt. All in a second the shore thickets gushed men, the very rocks of the earth seemed to spew them. One moment they were not, the next moment they were, as if borne up on the oscillations of an earthquake or the breath of a tornado, Northwesters all, outnumbering Wayne's force as Wayne's had outnumbered the York boats' crews.

In hiding from the first, their rush, timed to the fraction of a second, caught the Free-Traders in the moment of disadvantage, just in the act of replacing the oars in the locks. Carlisle could see that the Northwesters had a stout cable in their hands, stretched taut as a rod, a score of men on either end. With a surge and splash they hurled themselves through the shallows, and like a giant scythe the taut cable cleared the York boats at one stroke, sweeping the Free-Traders overside like manikins from their perch.

In a flash the cable was lashed onto the leading boat, the other boats lashed onto the first, and already the flotilla was being towed rapidly toward Richelieu's post. As well as being equipped with a land-gate, the Northwest fort boasted a water-gate, part of the stockade extending out over the water, enclosing a little harbour entered through a heavy log barrier that was raised by ropes on capstan-like drums inside.

Carlisle saw that the water-gate stood open and that it was Richelieu's plan to slide the York boats, cargoes and all, inside his palisades. He

marked the Northwest leader at the head of the trackers, pulling, exhorting, cursing the clumsy.

"Name of a name, is it a hearse, then? And *par Dieu!* do not fall over your own feet. Quick! Quick! Straight ahead, and the sooner the better!"

With an imprecation Carlisle took a running leap from the shore, Drummond, Galt, Smoking Pine, and the straggle of Cumberland House men launching after, backed up by the dripping York boats' crews. He landed with a geyser-like splash among the knot of trackers, grappling with the cursing Richelieu, his feet slipping upon the shelving rock. Together they went down in the shallows, rolling and wrenching. Half-a-dozen men fell on top of them. The boats, never stopping in their career, bumped them aside, and in the scramble Carlisle's grip was torn from Richelieu.

He found his footing again and staggered up, but as he emerged from the water a flying oar blade caught him on the side of the head, knocking him, half-stunned, across the gunwale of one of the boats. In a daze he felt himself dragged along, half in half out of the water. All about him surged shouting, snarling tangles of men, black as demons against the silver moonlight, his own adherents striking and tearing at the towers on the ropes, hacking at the lashings themselves, while the Northwesters fended them off.

Occasionally a rifle spat out, but at too close quarters for indiscriminate shooting, in a maze where they hardly discerned friend from enemy,

the Hudson's Bay men smote with clubbed rifles, pieces of broken oars, rocks, knives, axes. Yet despite the weight of their attack the York boats were sliding foot by foot toward Richelieu's water-gate.

Within a few hundred feet of it Carlisle pulled himself up once more with a resurgence of strength and cast himself into the fray. Knocking men right and left, he seized the last boat by the stern and with all the mighty power of his body swung it sidewise toward the shore.

"Eugene! Galt!" he importuned. "Any of you there—hold the bows!"

His idea was to turn the flotilla broadside on so that it could not enter the water-gate and thus delay it till more reinforcements could arrive from Cumberland House. Without a doubt the manœuvre would have been successful had it not been for the length of the Northwesters' cable.

The loose end of it had been seized by men in the water-gate and whipped round one of the capstan-like drums inside. Others threw themselves on the bars, and with a wrench and run the flotilla was torn bodily from the hands of Carlisle and his companions and snaked through the water-gate.

The heavy log barrier dropped with a rumble and splash, and a loud cheer burst from the victorious Northwesters within. Still cheering, they ran to the palisades, and the hail of their bullets began to splat-splat in the shallows uncomfortably close to Carlisle and the rest.

It was madness to crouch there in the moonlight, black targets for guns behind log walls. The Hudson's Bay men paused only long enough hurriedly to shoulder their wounded and disabled and broke into a run for Cumberland House.

As Carlisle lurched along in the rear he could discern the baffled Free-Traders off toward Fort Wayne, making for their own stockade. By his great height he marked Wayne among them and close beside Wayne the shimmer of Joan's dress. Well, he read her riddle now. But her need was not yet satisfied. Richelieu had won!

In the trading-room of Cumberland House the panting Hudson's Bay men let down their burdens under the candlelight: the lifeless Chipewewa, Cotameg, shot fairly through the head; two wounded white men of the post with bullets through their thighs; three men of the York boats' crews with splintered bones in their arms or legs.

Hardly a man was there but showed the marks of the battle, cracked heads, smashed knuckles, flesh wounds and bruises without end, and as they felt each other over to make sure there was no more serious hurt, Father Andrews appeared in the doorway.

Roused from sleep by the commotion, his cassock only half-belted on by its cord, he came; and at his entrance Eugene Drummond, wiping the blood from his swarthy face, dropped his handkerchief with an amazed exclamation.

"Ba gar!" he whispered, hoarsely, "hees face—hees face for sure!"

Andrews in his hurry had forgotten his mosquito veil, and for the first time in twenty-one years Drummond saw his features. Yet he saw them only for an instant and then only in the semi-obscurity of the doorway. Eugene's exclamation struck the priest like a warning word.

His hand went up and drew close the cowl of his cassock before he stepped from the threshold into the fuller light of the candles. Though the veil was not there, the shadow of the cowl lay dark across his features. Drummond could read them no longer.

"In the name of Heaven, what's been going on, Paul?" demanded Andrews. "What have you done?"

"Done?" echoed Carlisle, grimly. "Brought you a corpse and some patients, Father. You'll have to bury Cotameg and look after the others well while I'm away."

"Away?" echoed the priest in his turn. "What do you mean?"

He took a step after Carlisle as the latter, unanswering, passed out through the trading-room doorway.

"Are you leaving Cumberland House, then, Paul?" he asked.

"Yes," Carlisle told him, "I'm going down river for the rest of my York boats."

"Oh! The ones from the Pas came on, eh? That was the cause of the fighting?"

"Yes, they came, three of them, Andrews, and—I sold them for a kiss!"

CHAPTER NINE

MUTINY

LEWIS, his craggy face puckered in bewilderment, stared long at the canoe gliding in to his post of the Pas. It was the Factor's craft, all right. He could recognize Wascyawin and Missowa, bowsman and steersman, and the four middlemen as well, and there was Carlisle himself amidships with Eugene Drummond by his side. Yet why were they here? It was not in accordance with the outlined plans or the issued orders. Something had happened. Something had gone wrong. Lewis tugged at his gray beard and muttered a wondering monologue till the Factor was close enough to hail him.

"Well, Lewis, how is it with everything here at the Pas?"

"Nae mon wull bother me, ye ken, Factor," replied Lewis. "I ha' done well wi' the trade, an' I maun no be complainin'. An' yersel'? Wha' aboot the York boats? Had they ony trouble gettin' up?"

"No, but lots of trouble when they got there. Richelieu has them now, cargoes and all, and I'm bound down for the others."

"The deil! An' ye are sayin' so, Factor? But wull ye no be stoppin' a bit?"

"No—no time," refused Carlisle, sheering off again. "I just wanted to let you know. Keep a tight hand, Lewis. I'll see you again on the way back!"

On down the river the huge canoe leaped, flinging its miles behind, winding round its interminable curves to Chimawawin lying where the Saskatchewan broadened into Cedar Lake, but Hampton had no boats there.

"Us hasn't larned aught about them from Jarvis, Factor," was his report to Carlisle. "Not likely they comed across the lake yet or it's a very mistaken judgment I has."

So they were off again down Cedar Lake through the Narrows, past the Demie Charge Rapids, past the Roche Rouge Rapids to the Grand Rapids post. Here the Saskatchewan, watering a vast empire in its long journey from the Rockies, poured at last into Lake Winnipeg, and here Jarvis had the same report as Hampton. Only three York boats had crossed the lake, the three that had gone on to the Pas.

Jarvis couldn't tell the cause of the delay. They might be still on the river, or they might be moored at Norway House waiting for favourable weather to cross. Jarvis did not know. He would not know till they arrived.

"But strike me blind in the blinkers if they ayn't put Heskimos or some other God-fors'yken copper-skins on for crews!" he prophesied. "'Cos w'y should it tyke them this long to reach 'ere? Cawn't come fine and dry! Have to wait for the dirty rain and blows. We 'aven't but three

seasons 'ere anyw'y, Factor—July, Haugust and winter!"

Carlisle would have continued on across the lake to Norway House, but the October rains and gales were on and the Winnipeg was too dangerous at the moment for canoe travel. Perforce he fretted away the days at Grand Rapids, ever watching for the lift of the York boats through the squalls. The breath of winter blew frostily down the vast inland sea.

All the forest was a dying blaze of colour, cardinal-leaved moose maples, yellow birches, canary willows, umber cottonwoods, silvered poplars, burning brightly against the sere grasses of the gulches and the purple-black spruce of the hills. Then a weird storm with thunder, lightning, hail, sleet quenched the flame in a night, and the next morning the forests were stripped to their swaying trunks and moaning branches.

Stark as a skeleton lay the land, with the sifting snow padding its bare ribs and ragged vertebræ like leprous flesh. The flowers were swept from the hills. No longer Carlisle saw in the dance of bluebells Joan's laughing eyes; no longer he caught in the breeze-blown daisies the golden shimmer of her hair. He cursed the laggard York boats and wore out his eyes trying to pierce Winnipeg's wrack of storm.

The lake raged incessantly, a winter-harrowed maelstrom, its headlands hidden by the breaking waves, its islands frost-armoured over, its beach littered with shore ice broken off and cast high like chips, its three hundred miles of

rollers ramping to the clouds, roaring at the migrant rout scudding through the snow.

"Ae, Factor, it is not Wenipak now," described Waseyawin who with Missowa always watched at his shoulder. "It is Keche (the ocean) Wenipak."

"So," nodded Missowa, "but in three days the wind will lose its breath. The air will be sweet and warm."

"Indian summer, eh, Missowa?" asked Carlisle.

"Thus the white men call it, but it is not of this earth. It comes from afar, from another world. It is the time when the spirits of our forefathers rise to go forth on the winter hunt, and in that time of calm, Factor, your boats will arrive."

Missowa's words proved true. In three days the wind seemed to have blown out its lungs. The earth poised in a vacuum through which stole mellow lights, a haze of incense, chatter of birds, droning of bees, the gurgle of running rapids. The snow steamed on the slopes, and the river ice pooled with black water, when all in one fleet, manned by York Factory Indians and steered by half-breeds, out of the dank lake vapour the York boats rose like hoary ghost craft.

There had been a forest fire on the Hayes after the routing of the first boats up, they said, and these later ones had been forced to clear the stream of miles of half-burned trees.

Carlisle was ready for them. When the passing of the autumn season showed him that there was no hope of getting the cargoes up-river by boat, he had made ready his toboggans, dog teams, snowshoes and all his winter gear. Now the transfer from boats to dog teams was arranged. Before all was completed the weather changed again.

Some invisible hand loosed the leash that held the wind, opened the snowgates of the sky. The frosts bit like the stroke of steel. Ahead lay a foot of river and lake ice covered with sand-like drifts.

At Chimawawin the Factor drew on Hampton for a fresh relay of men, dogs, and toboggans and sent the first relay back to Grand Rapids to bring on the surplus stuff he had been compelled to leave behind for lack of outfits. At the Pas he repeated, sending back both relays, and out of the Pas on the home trail he marshalled a long train of toboggans each drawn by six huskies and loaded with one thousand pounds apiece.

With a surge of joy he turned his face up stream on the final relay. It was the company's business, but his heart was not in it. His heart was up yonder on Sturgeon Lake where a mad girl would have finished by this time the food he had surreptitiously given her and no doubt be pining for more!

Of a truth, Joan was pining for more. Like medicine in her blood the provisions Carlisle had given her brought back the roses to her

cheeks, but it was only for a little, and when the delicacies were done she failed more rapidly than before. Worry aided malnutrition.

The failure to capture the Hudson's Bay Company's York boats chagrined her and her father beyond measure. For Wayne's attempt was no mere hostile raid. It was a serious venture forced by the dire need of better sustenance, and the fact that Richelieu had outwitted them as well as Carlisle was bitter as hemlock drink.

Wayne brooded over it continually, and his brooding finally brought him to a reluctant decision.

"By the Doom, Joan, I'll have to send you out," he told her, his eyes dwelling longingly upon her. "We've never been separated before, but I think the time has come. It's too late now to get you out by canoe, but on the first snow I'll send you with Mason by dog team to St. Paul."

"No, no, Father," Joan passionately protested. "I can't leave you here alone. I couldn't bear it alone at St. Paul. I'll fight it out with you. Oh! My dear, I want to. I must. I will. There," laughing her old gay laugh as she cast herself into his arms, "there's your defiant daughter, sir! But don't worry. I'll be all right, Father. Let us both be cheerful. I'm sure something unexpected will turn up."

She had no communication with Cumberland House and knew nothing of the Hud-

son's Bay Company's plans, for since the battle over the York boats the tension had tightened about all three posts and rivalry had grown more bitter. The gates were always closed now and a watch kept upon the palisades.

Antagonism flared openly. The woods were full of surprises. By night daring raiders dashed out trying to put torch to their enemies' stockades. By day sharp skirmishes occurred. Wood-gathering parties were put to flight and hunters fired at on lonely forest trails.

Yet never in those eventful days had Joan seen or heard anything of Carlisle. She wondered at his seclusion, his silence. Perhaps he had been unable to secure more supplies for himself! But in any event he had intimated that he would not forget her if she were in need, and though she was not just sure that her pride would let her accept, nevertheless she resented the absence of any overture.

The weeks passed without any sign from him, the geese went south, the snow fell, and the frost crackled. Her indisposition increased day by day. To the observant Wayne her trouble seemed threefold—the disturbing effect of the straight meat diet, the brooding over the Free-Trade prospects, and an apparent canker, heart-longing, for which he could find no reason. Casting about for a reason, his mind turned upon Carlisle.

As a magnanimous enemy he had brought her food to the palisades, food which Wayne in a wrath was prone to throw away had it

not been for the girl's actual need. Was he more than a magnanimous enemy? Wayne recalled the intimacy between him and Joan during the earlier part of the canoe journey from Grande Portage, also the fact that, together, they had voyaged the latter part of it without him.

Foreboding entered into him. Perhaps it was not worry, not dangerous diet he had to fear most! Perhaps something else was eating her youthful health away, the consuming desire of the void spaces of her heart, the emaciating hunger of her soul—a hunger he himself had suffered all these years.

"You had better let me send over to Cumberland House for Father Andrews," he suggested. "He's skilled with medicines, and no doubt he'll be able to give you something to help you."

"No, Father, no, you mustn't," she flashed with genuine fire. "We ask nothing of the Hudson's Bay Company, and if word passes between the posts it must come first from Cumberland House."

Still her sickness persisted, and Wayne cursed the eternal, nauseating, gorge-raising meat. It was affecting even his iron self. It was affecting all his men. He had disconcerting visions of scurvy and plague, and he told Mason to see that the men brewed spruce tea and drank it as a preventive. But the men had long been muttering among themselves, brewing a draft of trouble.

They grumbled at their fare, grumbled at the

spruce tea, and, when no one was looking, threw it in the snow. They had not bargained, they told each other, to live through the winter eating each day three meals of flesh and flesh alone, all for the sake of the Indians' trade.

They knew that if they went out fifty or one hundred miles to the Indians' teepees in their hunting districts and took back what supplies they needed, they would stir the tribes to bloodshed and kill Wayne's trade and prestige at one stroke, but this they violently threatened to do. Straight meat was all right for Eskimos and pagan Indians, they stormed, but they had been born in the South!

Had Wayne not been so preoccupied with his daughter's condition, he would have marked the fermentation of discontent, the progression of discontent to open mutiny, but he spent most of his time with Joan, who, lapsing from her usual vigorous activity, lay listless and tired upon a couch by the fireplace in his council-room. Through the shortening winter days and the ever-lengthening nights he would sit smoking by her side, staring at the pale face upon the black bearskin couch-robcs, racking his brains for a way out of the situation, pleading with her in vain to let him get medicines or send her south.

Mason warned him once that he feared the men might get out of hand, and he promised to look into the matter, but the warning slipped from his mind in the treacherous fashion things had been slipping of late. He never remem-

bered it till his brigade leader stalked in on him and Joan one wintry dusk with the news that the men had not come back that afternoon from their fuel-gathering.

Rudely shaken out of his thinking and brooding, Wayne leaped up, mentally alert, poised at his full height as if scented danger had put him on his guard.

"How's that, Mason?" he demanded. "How long have they been away? When'd they leave the post?"

"Jist at noon, Wayne, and I'm sartinly gittin' anxious."

"But, maybe they're working late, Mason; maybe they've had a brush with Northwesters or Hudson's Bay choppers and are lying low to get in under cover of the dark."

The Missourian shook his head, his weather-wrinkled, alkali-seared face creasing deeper in his anxiety.

"Mebbe so," he doubted, "but thar ain't the ring of an axe or the spit of a rifle to be heerd. The woods is as still as a cussed vault."

"No noise, eh?" pondered Wayne. "That's suspicious. By the Doom, Mason, if they're trying to play me tricks, I'll have the skins of the whole crowd! How many are left in the Fort?"

"You, me, Murdock, and three more."

"Well, tell Murdock and the three to stand keen watch. You and I'll go out and find them."

"Oh! Don't leave me here alone, Father," pleaded Joan, sliding off the couch and glancing apprehensively at the winter dark on the win-

dow-pane, at the sombre shadows of the room. "Take me with you. I don't know what's the matter with me, but I'm all nerves, and I can't stay here alone."

"All right, Joan," he humoured her. "It's not very far. Put on something warm and come with us."

Over her blanket-cloth suit she slipped her warmest capote, beautifully cased in ermine with the edge of the hood fringed with tails of the silver fox. She thrust her moccasined toes into the loops of her tasselled snowshoes and passed out between her father and Mason over the soft snows into the woods. Shuffling without a sound they went, Wayne and Mason on their broad bear's-paw shoes, their rifles thrown across their left arms in readiness.

Around them crept the eeriness of the winter night, deep shadow in the underbrush, a half twilight in the open aisles, the snow's refraction of the starlight filtering through the festooned branches.

The forest was a fairyland filled with fantastic shapes, a strange cathedral packed with voiceless worshippers standing, white-robed, huddled upon their knees, or lying prone upon their hidden faces; and over all, like the shroud of the dead, spread the everlasting snow, cloaked on the tree boles, bossed on the stumps, draped from the interwoven branches, plumed on the spruce tops overhead.

From the roofed aisles they stepped out into the slashed clearing where the Free-Trading

men had been at work. There lay the trampled, chip-littered crust, the felled trees, the sawn log lengths, the chopped stove wood, all just as it had been left. The very axes were still sunk in the scored blocks. A few ghostly hares at play about the piles vanished as the snowshoes began to clatter on the chips. Wayne stooped abruptly to examine something on the surface of the padded area.

"By the Doom—look!" he commanded, harshly.

Joan and Mason stared, speechless. Even in the poor light they recognized the litter Wayne pointed out, frozen bread crusts, rinds of bacon, the chocolate blotch of tea-leaves, a forgotten rum jug lying empty on the snow.

"Condemnation!" Wayne blazed in terrific wrath. "You're sure it's our chopping ground, Mason?"

"Tarnation sure!" avowed Mason. "Didn't I set them to work here and leave them workin'? And they ain't shifted sence, fer them's our axes."

"The cursed curs! There's only one place they could get that stuff to eat!"

Wayne was off as he spoke, running round the edge of the clearing, searching for the trail of the intruders.

"Here are their tracks!" he shouted. "Dozens of them, coming from the direction of Richelieu's post. The Northwesters wear longer-tailed snowshoes than ours, and there are the marks of both kinds going back. By Heaven, Richelieu has

drawn them off! Come on, Mason. Come on, Joan."

At a great speed he lurched out of the woods again over the snows toward Fort Wayne, Joan and Mason running in the path he broke.

"Murdock, Murdock!" he yelled to the gatekeeper. "Send out your three. You yourself stand in the entrance with rifle ready. My men have been eating and drinking with the North-westerns."

Dropping one armed man every hundred yards or so to form a line of communication with Murdock in the open gateway of his own fort, Wayne led on to Richelieu's post. Mason he kept by him, and Joan, in spite of his entreaties to stay back on this line of communication, followed persistently upon their heels.

The gateway of the Northwest post stood open as they ran up, and in the yellow glow that flooded from the lighted windows out across the trampled yard they could see Richelieu himself, a heavy military coat partially covering his resplendent uniform, standing in the entrance, waiting as if he had expected such a visit.

"*Comment?*" he chuckled when he saw their faces. "What do you want now?"

"My men—curse you!" exploded Wayne, his rifle threatening from the hip. "They're here. I want them quick!"

Richelieu was unarmed, but he showed not the slightest fear of Wayne's nor Mason's weapon. He reached out and plucked Wayne by the arm, drawing him midway into the entrance

and pointing to a big door in the mess building that faced the gate. The door had just opened wide to admit two Northwesters rolling in a keg of liquor, and it revealed a long, candlelighted table inside, loaded with food and lined with feasting men.

"*Ciel!* see them!" Richelieu urged, maliciously. "Hunger is a great chastener, Ralph Wayne. They were tempted, and they fell. There they are, yours and mine together. I am not holding yours. Go and take them."

With a growl Wayne shook off the hand on his arm and darted for the door.

"Mason, stay at the gate with Joan," he flung over his shoulder, "and put a bullet through that laughing devil if he so much as moves!"

Joan did not obey as her father expected she would. Instead, she inserted her hand within her capote, felt in the pocket of her blanket coat to assure herself that her pistol was there, and followed her father up to the door of the mess building.

Inside reigned bedlam, pandemonium, drunken Northwesters and Free-Traders all mingled together, gorging themselves at the table, laughing, singing, shouting, smiting each other's backs at ribald stories, and hammering the board with their liquor mugs. As wild a revel as eve he glimpsed, Wayne saw under the candlelight, and the sight sent him up the steps in a single jump.

In a whirl of passion he jammed between the two Northwesters who were rolling in the liquor

keg, put sole upon the keg itself on the top step, and sprang into the mess room with his rifle clubbed.

"You condemned traitors! You treacherous sneaks!" he denounced, furiously, his gloomy face ablaze, his moustache quivering, his rifle-butt swaying every second as if to crash down upon the nearest head. "You steal off into the woods and devour like dogs what these dirty Northwesters throw you, while my own daughter starves for a bit of good food. Get up! Get up on your drunken legs and out of this!"

They were too far gone in liquor for shame. Just a moment of bewildered staring, and a wave of laughter and jeering drowned his rage. They guffawed in his face, Northwester and Free-Trader alike, pounding the table more violently and making the room shake with their incoherent cries. While from the head of the feast one Harris, a Mississippi river-man and wood boss of the men that day, rose up teetering on his toes.

"Come'n' have a drink, Wayne," he invited, "'n I'll sing ye a li'l' song. Lissenere——"

"By the Doom, you were responsible, Harris!" Wayne roared in interruption. "And you're responsible still. Get the men out. Call them out, you, every staggering son of them, or as sure as you're drunk yourself, you'll never sing again!"

Wayne's rifle-butt poised over Harris's head, but without warning the two shrewd Northwesters in the doorway shot their rolling keg into Wayne's legs from behind. Wayne went down

backward, flat on the floor, his rifle flying from his hands. The two Northwesters were upon him like cats, clutching and grappling, preventing his hands from securing the weapon again.

Joan gave a cry as she saw her father go down and groped in her coat for her pistol. Mason had also seen from the gate, and he sprang forward, his rifle outflung. With the lightning-like sighting of the woodsman he took a snap shot in the doorway, but he had bargained without Richelieu. The latter reached the step as quick as Mason, struck up the Missourian's rifle-barrel, sending the shot wild, and wrestled for the possession of the weapon.

Joan had her own weapon out, but both her father and Mason whirled in such a tangle of bodies that she dared not shoot for fear of injuring them. She hovered on the step of the mess-room doorway, screaming for aid through the frosty night.

"Murdock, Murdock!" she entreated, frenziedly. "My father—here! Bring all the other men, quick!"

Tearing forward abreast the four broke through the gateway, but Richelieu had not been there alone. Back in the shadows of the stockade he had others lurking silently, waiting for such a rush. As Murdock and his three companions surged through, a dozen Northwesters leaped bodily upon them, bearing them down, smothering their spitting rifles in the snow.

"*Tiens! Mademoiselle Joan,*" gloated Richelieu, emerging from the fighting group that

overpowered Mason, "you are the only one left and you I will take myself!"

With the throb of the trapped wild thing in her breast Joan sprang aside from his reach, doubled back upon him like an agile hare, and raced for the gateway. The Northwesters still struggling to pinion Murdock and the other three Free-Traders, there was no one in the entrance to stop her, but Richelieu was gaining on her at every stride.

She had on her snowshoes, and he, in moccasins only, outran her on the packed snow of the yard. The lurch of her running caused her to hold her fire while Richelieu dodged and laughed jeeringly, straining every moment to catch her before she left the palisades.

Once, twice, three, four—five times she pretended to fire. Then in the gateway she whirled, snapping the shot in Richelieu's face only arm's length away. She saw his head flip back as if jolted with a fist. His body slumped, feet forward, on the snow and slid in against the open gate. Joan turned and ran with palpitating heart across the deep snows outside.

She knew there was not a Free-Trader left in Fort Wayne, no safety for her in her own post. There was only one destination in her mind—Cumberland House. There was only one object of appeal—Carlisle. With him there was at least sanctuary from Richelieu and his wild crew, and, magnanimous enemy as he was, he would surely come to the aid of her father as he had done once before!

Like the wind she ran, springing from the heel on the resilient webbing of her shoes, twisting her feet in the swing of the stride to clear her ankles of the fast-shifting frames, spurning the snow in white jets behind her.

She looked back fearfully over her shoulder to see if Richelieu had arisen or if any of his men were following, but she saw nothing, heard nothing but the shouting and laughter in the Northwest post. The noise faded with the distance. She was alone on the cameo snow lighted faintly by the stars and a wan aurora that brightened the horizon to the northward.

Cumberland House loomed ahead, the snow-roofed buildings crouching within the drifted stockade, rimmed by the black wall of the forest, and she pressed to the limit of her speed. As she swerved into the trampled path before the gate, another sound besides the shuffling of her snowshoes drifted to her ears.

She paused, listening in the void of the frost, and immediately her wilderness-trained ears interpreted the other sound, a blending of toboggan creak, husky pant, snowshoe crunch, whip-crack—the weird harmony of a coming dog train on the trail.

Wondering, Joan wheeled, staring out over the snow-blanketed ice, and under the play of the aurora she glimpsed it, revealed, concealed, and revealed again by the flashlight flares, the whole train imaged against the pallid background like a painting of the Northland wastes.

She caught the impression in its entirety,

the long, winding furrow dotted with the loaded toboggans all exactly alike except that the more distant diminished in size; the track beaters ahead of the dogs leaning forward on their smoking shoes; the straining, steaming, six-dog teams; the drivers on the run, their whips writhing through the air; the armed guards with rifles slung upon their hunched shoulders.

And the figure in front of all, tall, big of frame, flattening the drifts with great seven-foot snowshoes cut long and swift in their lines for open-river work, seemed to her vaguely familiar.

There was something in his poise of body, in his stride, in the way he held his head, looking straight forward under the hood of his capote, that insinuated itself into her consciousness. With a flash of enlightenment, illumination of brain or heart she could not tell which, she suddenly knew him. Even under the furred capote she knew him.

"Paul, Paul!" she cried, and dashed down the snowy bank toward him.

CHAPTER TEN

THE RED DEATH

"You, Joan!—now the God of Northmen is good!" exulted Carlisle, catching her hands and bringing her to a stop upon her coasting snow-shoes. "I was never dreaming——"

But his gauntleted palm had closed upon the hard steel weapon in her grip, and his tone changed.

"Good heavens, girl, what's this? What's wrong?"

"Oh, come quickly, Paul, you and your force!" she implored. "My father's a prisoner in Richelieu's post with all his men."

Involuntarily his mind flew back to the night when with this very weapon, and with other weapons more mighty, she had delayed him from reaching his York boats in time to prevent them being captured.

Yet he knew this was no ruse of hers. There was no doubting the sincerity of her words as she poured out the story of Richelieu's cunning and how with his hands almost upon her he had fallen to her shot in the gateway of his stockade.

"Curse him!" Carlisle anathematized. "I hope it's through his dirty heart. Let me

help you up the bank, Joan. There! My men will be up in a minute."

From the top of the bank he began to call out the news to them, to Eugene Drummond, Missowa, Waseyawin, and their four middlemen who with the coming of winter at Grand Rapids had put aside canoe and paddle for toboggan and racket. They together with the drivers from the lower river posts cracked their whips more lustily, urging on the dogs.

"*Marche! Marche!*" they called. "*Hu! Hu!*"

With the spume flying from the toboggan hoods they made a rush at the incline, teams clawing tenaciously, track-beaters hauling from the front with tow ropes, drivers shoving from behind. Toboggan after loaded toboggan undulated over the crest amid a mist-like shower of snow.

"*Chaw! Chaw!*" yelled the drivers, and the *giddes* swerved to the right into the beaten track that wound up to the gates of Cumberland House.

"Who comes there?" demanded the loud voice of Galt.

"Carlisle," was the answer. "Hurry up, Galt. There's trouble over at Richelieu's post, and we're needed there."

Immediately the gate swung open, and the dog-drivers cracked their whips anew.

"*Yee! Yee!*" they commanded.

The teams hauled round to the left with the sweep of the trail and galloped triumphantly

into the yard where they were swallowed up by a rush of shouting men.

"Where's Andrews, Galt?" asked Carlisle, bellowing to make himself heard in the clamour.

"Here, Paul," answered Andrews himself, pushing through the crowd, garbed in his winter gear, the heavy capote with the fur-fringed, helmet-like hood drawn as close about his face as he was wont to draw the dun cowl and mosquito veil in summer. "I'm glad you're safely back, also glad to see you've got supplies."

"Forest fires delayed the York boats, Father, so that the frost caught us."

"Who's that with you? Ah—you, Miss Wayne."

"Yes, and it's only by grace of a lucky bullet that she is here," Carlisle told him. "Richelieu, you understand! Her father and his men are prisoners, she says, and she did well to escape."

"You brave girl!" eulogized Andrews, taking her hands. "But you didn't—kill him?" he added, anxiously.

"I—I don't know," confessed Joan. "I fired in his face, and he went down. That's all I know."

"A job for you in any case, Father," intimated the Factor, "and who knows but you may have many more! Galt," giving orders to the chief trader, "have the drivers of the lower river posts keep guard here. Arm all our Cumberland House force and bring them on our heels."

He turned through the entrance again with Joan and Andrews, and Eugene Drummond, Waseyawin, Missowa, and their middlemen sped

after, trailed by the rest of the Hudson's Bay men as fast as Galt could hand out the weapons.

As they skimmed back on Joan's tracks toward the Northwest post, they saw that the gate was still open, and at the entrance the girl hesitated with repugnance till Carlisle took her hand with a reassuring gesture.

There was blood upon the snow but no sign of Richelieu himself. Ahead of them, across the space of the yard, bulked the log mess building. The door was closed, but a yellow glow sprayed from the lighted square of the windows on either side of the door-jambs.

Listening, they could hear no singing or shouting, but the angry hum of voices buzzed from within as from a colossal hive of bees.

"We'd better leave our snowshoes here," suggested Carlisle. "And don't make a sound in the yard."

He set the example by twisting his toes from their loops and sticking the tails of his shoes into the snow. The others did the same, creeping after him, panther-footed in their moccasins, through the hard-packed yard. They reached the level of the steps without noise and, craning their necks, peered through the lighted window on the nearer side of the door.

Inside the rough-walled mess-room the feast was all disordered, the feasters all disarranged, although it was at once apparent that no hand had been laid upon the main body of the Free-Traders who had partly composed the feast.

Too drunk to care what company ruled the

Northland, they slouched in their chairs or lolled forward across the table, grinning maudlinly at the plight of Wayne who had sought to chastise them. Upon half-a-dozen chairs Wayne, Mason, Murdock, and the other three sober men sat in a row against the wall, their limbs bound tightly to the chair backs and the chair legs.

Across one cleared end of the table lay Richelieu, his uniform flashing bright under the candlelight as three or four Northwesters worked over him, and in the ministering hands those outside could see his muscles stir slightly.

"He's not dead, anyway, thank Heaven!" whispered Andrews.

"Then the devil must have him in special keeping!" growled Carlisle under his breath as he laid his hand quietly on the latch. "Stand well to one side of the door-jamb, Joan, and you, Andrews, in case of shooting."

He swung the door wide and stepped swiftly upon the doorsill, two long pistols in his hands covering the packed room.

"*Bon soir, messieurs!*" he greeted them, mockingly.

He gave neither order nor threat, yet instinctively they knew his intent and froze into immobility, staring at his huge figure in the frost-rimed, furred capote and at the other figures, likewise frost-rimed, who crowded behind him on the steps, their long-barrelled rifles looking down the table.

"So Richelieu met with a little accident in his game," Carlisle laughed. "Is he badly hurt?"

"Not badly we think, *m'sieu'*," returned one of the Northwesters somewhat sullenly, "but you have a doctoring priest there. He could tell."

"Surely," acquiesced Carlisle. "Will you take a look at him, Father?"

He made room for Andrews to push in, and the priest walked up to the table where Richelieu lay.

"Through the muscles of his neck, *Père*," the Frenchman pointed out the course of the ball. "He is just on the edge of—how do you say it?—coming to!"

"Yes," nodded Andrews, passing a lighted candle over Richelieu as he lay, "and no great danger in that ball through his neck muscles! But do you see what is all through his face?"

"Frost scars?" hazarded the Northwester, staring.

"Frost scars? No, you never saw frost scars like those. The man has smallpox!"

Swifter and harder than lead the diagnosis hit them. Every one in the room seemed to start as if from a violent shock. The Northwesters around Richelieu threw up their arms before their faces in tangible defence against the plague, while all the rest crossed themselves in palpable terror.

Even the slouching Free-Traders were stirred. The horrible significance of the word penetrated their drunken consciousnesses. They stood up unsteadily, their faces whitening, sucking in their breaths in nervous clicks.

Yet only for an instant did the great crowd cower. Abruptly, in a frantic rush, in an insane stampede they dashed for the doorway.

Carlisle's big frame blocked the exit, and he met the rush with clubbed pistols. Like cattle they came, shoving, trampling, frenzied with fear. Three of them went down from his clubbed weapons. A dozen more were hurled back from the stiff rifle-barrels around him, as from the ends of lances.

The rout fell aside, temporarily checked, swerved and made for the windows. Swinging chairs, they smashed away the glass and frames, but at Carlisle's command several of his men had sprung to the outside of the windows, and an array of rifle-barrels speared the Northwesters back into the room.

"Stop!" roared Carlisle through the crashing babel. "Stop your panic or I'll order my men to shoot. They can rake the whole place from the door and windows. Which will you face: smallpox or bullets?"

The threat stayed for a little their wild frenzy, and Carlisle seized upon the moment of their uncertainty to try to prevent another stampede.

"There's no use in making confounded fools of yourselves," he told them. "You have to face the situation anyway, so why not face it like men? I'm not going to let you get away to any other post or Indian camp to spread the infection there. Just make up your minds to fight a sane fight here. First, some Free-Trader cut loose Wayne and the rest!"

Harris, the Mississippi River man who had wanted to sing Wayne a song, stepped forth. The crisis had sobered him like a dash of cold water, and he quickly slit the chair lashings with his sheath knife, freeing the six men.

"Now, Wayne, you and your Free-Traders are under confinement with the Northwesters," Carlisle informed him. "I hope you're not thinking of making any trouble about it. If you are, make it right now and we'll have it over with."

"Do you take me for a cursed fool?" blazed Wayne. "I know smallpox. I had it myself once on the Red River. My men have been hobnobbing with these Northwesters and two of the dirty dogs mauled me all over. Why, I wouldn't dream of going back to my post. I wouldn't go near my worst enemy. I wouldn't rub up against you, Carlisle, and I hate you worse than a hundred hells."

"Thanks," Carlisle sent back, sarcastically. "Wayne, you're no hypocrite, anyway!"

"But for heaven's sake, watch my girl," Wayne implored in his next breath. "Keep her away from this place. Joan, stand back from the doorway, there."

"I'm all right, father," Joan assured him. "I've never been in the room."

"Did Richelieu touch you, girl?"

"No, father, no, he didn't. And how I wish you'd never gone in after your men!"

"So do I, though I'm not afraid for myself," growled her father. "But it can't be helped

now. Anyhow, not likely anything will come of it. What's the programme, Carlisle?"

"Everybody parade for inspection," Carlisle answered. "You'll all pass before Andrews. Any further cases remain here in the mess-room with Richelieu. The rest go over to the trading-room till we see what develops. Richelieu's house we'll save for the recoveries. File up, everyone!"

Some bold, some fearful, nearly all nervous, they passed in review before the priest, who examined each one closely for symptoms with his lighted candle. Now and then he put a question bearing on their general health or diet.

Twice he motioned a Northwester out of the line to sit down in a chair by the table. There was scarcely need to examine the Free-Traders, since they had been exposed to infection only that day, but for the impression of equality in the unfortunate circumstance Andrews scanned them over with the rest.

"Only the two cases besides Richelieu," he announced when he had finished his inspection.

"All right, the two cases can clear this room and knock together three bunks while the rest go to the trading-room as I said," directed Carlisle.

"But *bon Dieu!*" burst out the Northwester Dentaire, he of the pointed moustache and the large hawked nose, "do you mean to pack us there like curs waiting for the Red Death to come and choose which one?"

"Where else can I put you?" countered Carlisle. "Out in the freezing woods?"

"I—I will not go," Dentaire shrieked, his pale face contracting in convulsive muscular twitchings, his eyes staring wide, horrific, his trembling fingers never ceasing their continual crossing. "*Non ! Non ! Nor mes camarades either!*"

"Come out first, you!" ordered Carlisle, sensing a new outbreak and levelling his weapons at Dentaire.

Dentaire dived suddenly behind the crowd and with a sweep of his feet kicked out the legs of the big sheet-iron stove in the middle of the room. With a crash the mass of red-hot metal fell upon the floor, and its bushels of glowing coals poured out across the planks. Dry as dead moss, the slivery planks blazed up instantaneously, and not content with fire in one place Dentaire scattered the coal to all corners of the room.

"You hold us here to do your will?" he gibbered behind the screen of his fellows, "You will not let us out of the room? *Voilà*, then, there will be no room. The candles, *mes camarades*—the candles *aussi!*"

They seized them from the table and flung them lighted into anything inflammable, into the woodbox, into the cupboard, into piles of old papers on the shelves about the walls. The place was aflame in all quarters at once, choked with smoke and shaken to its foundations by the concerted rush to escape.

Dentaire, slim, swift as a dancing-master, was in the van of those who surged to the doorway. Half-minded at first to put a ball through him, Carlisle lowered his weapons and made way. The room was now a roaring furnace, and there was no holding men in it to be burned to death.

"Back from the door and windows," he ordered. "Galt, shut the gate and you, Joan, keep close to me. Back, men, I say, and for the lives of you don't touch any of them!"

"*Oui*, touch us at your peril," warned Dentaire. "Stop us at your doom. But put the hand on us and receive the Red Death!"

In a stream they gushed forth, leaping down the steps, vaulting over the window-sills, North-westers and Free-Traders together in wild flight. In strange anomaly, armed men backing away from men only partly armed, the Hudson's Bay force gave them the right of way. Weapons could hold domination over them penned within walls but not as a mad horde here in the open where a hand grip might prove more deadly than a bullet.

"Shoot!" Dentaire shrieked, crazily. "Shoot if you have the thought to keep us. You may kill one, two, six, a dozen, but I swear by the Virgin that the rest will lay the plague on you with their fingers! Come on, *mes camarades*, come on!"

"The demented fool!" denounced Carlisle, helplessly. "The whole mob of demented fools! Hold your fire, men. The idiot means what he says."

The rush passed them, some making for the gate, some for the shed next the store where the snowshoes and toboggans were kept. Galt had managed to wedge the gate bar so that it could not be withdrawn, but the crazed mob was not to be denied. Many climbed up on the palisades to the top of the gate. Many more grovelled in the snow at the bottom, worming their shoulders under the heavy barrier. With a united heave they tore the gate bodily from its hinges and hurled it aside.

Meanwhile their comrades had cast down the toboggans, thrown on the grub-bags from the store, seized their snowshoes, and rushed to join them. Together the two sections surged through the gateway, Northwesters and Free-Traders still mingled, all Richelieu's Frenchmen and post Indians, all Wayne's men of the Missouri, men of the Mississippi, men of the Red, his Crees and Chippewayans—the whole crowd that had been drinking with the Northwesters that day.

Their panic seemed to increase as they ran. They strained forward, bound for immunity wherever they might find it, falling over each other upon the aurora-lighted snows till they disappeared into the black mystery of the surrounding forest.

Except the Hudson's Bay forces, none remained in the yard but Richelieu whom Andrews and Wayne had carried out and laid down within the light and heat of the fire, Wayne himself, Mason, Murdock, and the three sober Free-Traders. Having contracted the disease one

summer while doctoring Indian camps on Eabammet Lake, Andrews, like Wayne, had no fear of contamination himself, yet he was careful to keep his patient apart from the others.

Although Richelieu stirred from time to time, he had never opened his lips or his eyes. Upon his forehead, close up to the hair, the priest could discern a large bruise where he had evidently struck his head against the gate in falling.

"The head blow is the cause of his unconsciousness rather than the neck wound," Andrews pointed out to Carlisle and the others who came peering from a respectful distance. "Where shall we take him, Paul? Is there any chance of saving the other buildings?"

"Not the slightest chance," Carlisle decided. "We'll do well if we keep the fire inside the palisades. We don't want it to get into that fringe of trees and round through the forest to the other posts. Richelieu must stay where he is for a little. He'll not be cold in this heat."

"You won't risk trying to get anything out, Paul—the supplies or the furs?" asked Joan, anxiously.

Carlisle shook his head grimly.

"No, the risk's too great! They've been handling the food and pelts, you see. We daren't touch anything, but I think we'll level the store and fur house to hold the flames as low as possible."

He ran outside the palisades with Galt, Drummond, and others and came back bearing long trunks of young spruce that had been drawn up

from the woods for fuel. These were five or six inches through and stripped of their branches, of a fit size to be handled as battering rams.

The mess building was all a-roar, throbbing on the night like the fire-pit of some gigantic engine, belching flame through windows and door and the roof that was commencing to sag.

The heat was terrific, lance-like, unbearable upon the uncovered flesh, but with the hoods of their capotes puckered tight to shield their faces from the flames, Carlisle and his men crept up to the buildings with the long spruce trunks in their gauntleted hands.

With swing and prod, swing and prod, they battered off the already burning roof troughs of the fur room, exposing the top logs which they began to rattle down tier by tier, but the fire was quicker than they.

It caught on the walls and beams and the pelts that hung thereon, and the flare of the greasy fats shot fifty feet into the air.

"What a waste!" deplored Joan, as Carlisle and the men were forced to fall back from the geyser of flame. "What a waste of splendid fur!"

"Yes, but it couldn't be otherwise," observed Carlisle. "We couldn't have saved it even if we had wanted to. The heat's enough to shrivel one!"

Still it was with a qualm of regret that he gazed over his shoulder as he rushed in again toward the store. Mink, marten, otter, ermine—costly, beautiful—blazed and wrinkled before his

eyes; rare silver and black fox skins singed and smouldered, the silky fur curling up like downy feathers to the licking flame. He saw it as desecration, as profanation, as a crime against the enduring wild—and all the handiwork of the panic-stricken Dentaire!

The roof of the store he got off before the fire reached it. The wall logs thundered down amid clanking showers of cooking utensils, knives, axes, and other trade-stuff from the shelves, his own trade-stuff that Richelieu had captured in his York boats. Piled upon the floor, standing revealed under the fire's glare, showed his own food supplies captured at the same time along with the trade-stuff.

"There were greases in the supplies, Galt," he told his chief trader, "pork and such, and some kegs of powder that might be dangerous. Pass the kegs along as I shove them out."

One by one with his pole butt he rolled the barrels and kegs off the floor, and they were prodded far back into the snow beyond the fire zone. Then he pushed down the top tier of the flour bags, stacked in layers of four. Three of the sacks fell with solid, dusty thuds. The fourth struck lightly and bounced to the feet of Galt.

"What's that, Henry?" asked Carlisle. "Not heavy enough for flour, is it?"

The chief trader stooped and scrutinized it by the brilliant light, discerning a canvas dun-nage bag with drawstrings in its mouth. It bore the customary marking H. B. C., and as Galt

turned it over with his pole the name "Cotameg" stared him in the face.

"By Nenaubosho! (the Cree Evil Spirit)!" he exclaimed. "It's the Chippewa's gear-bag, Factor. Piled in by mistake among the flour sacks when they captured your boats!"

"By Jove, Galt, is that so?" cried Carlisle, coming over to look. "Unlucky Cotameg! You buried him without his gear, eh?"

"We had to," declared Galt. "We couldn't find his gear, and I guess it was here all the time."

With a thud of his pole he broke the draw-strings in the mouth of the bag, thrust the end of the pole into the open mouth and shook it. Out rolled worn moccasins, soiled trousers of buckskin, frowsy *parflèches* of a filthiness unimaginable.

"Shades of bold Rupert!" blurted Carlisle. "I didn't know he was as dirty as all that. Is that the only gear he owned?"

But Galt's eyes were brighter than Carlisle had ever seen eyes of Cree shading. His face was more violently astounded than Carlisle had ever beheld a face of Cree casting.

"It's—it's not Cotameg's," he stammered, even his voice losing the unemotional timbre of his mother tongue. "It's old White Loon's and his family's—the smallpox Indians I stopped from coming in to Cumberland House!"

"By heavens! Galt, are you sure?" bellowed Carlisle.

"Sure? Didn't I stand and see them strip

it off at my orders? There are five moccasins, all of different sizes. White Loon had two sons, a nephew, and a cousin with him, you remember!

"Besides, I went out to drop a few trees on their camp and burn it at the first snow when there was no danger of firing the forest, but the clothes were gone. I put the theft down to the sneaky wolverines, set fire to the teepee, and thought no more about it."

"But, Galt, Cotameg didn't take and put them in his gear-bag. You understand Indians, and you know no Indian born would go near the smallpox camp at Carcajou Cove, much less lay a hand on anything there."

"I know," nodded Galt, pushing bag and all back into the fire. "It was no Indian who put them in Cotameg's bag. It was a white man, a white man with the iron nerve of the devil."

"Then who was that white man?" propounded Carlisle.

To the chief trader he put the question; to Eugene Drummond and all the Hudson's Bay forces behind; to Joan, hovering as near as the flames would let her; to Wayne and his five faithfuls grouped by themselves off to one side.

They stared at him unanswering, stricken dumb by the horrible enormity of the thing, and as he looked into their eyes, recollections of many past incidents flashed unbidden through Carlisle's mind.

He remembered that it was Cotameg who had let the Northwest mail-courier Bertand escape into Grande Portage, remembered Cotameg's

frequent absences from Cumberland House, his delay in coming in to the post from his fishing upon the morning he wanted to send him to the Pas, and the fact that Richelieu knew he had sent for his York boats and was on the watch for their coming.

"I see it now!" he burst out, suddenly. "Cotamieg was in Richelieu's pay from the first. The Chippewa must have been at the Northwest post that Sunday morning I sent him and Smoking Pine down river, and that's when his gear-bag was filled unknown to him. It was a plan to turn the plague loose in Cumberland House, but in the ways of the North the bag came back untouched to the one who filled it."

"My God! Paul," cried Joan, shuddering, "how could any man do that?"

"He ain't wan man," put in Drummond, promptly. "He be wan flamin' *diable*, an' if I be had ma way, I'm would t'row heem back into de fire w'ere he be come from."

"That's the way to talk, Drummond," supported Wayne. "It's only what he deserves."

"Maybe there's worse than fire in store for him," reminded Andrews, prophetically. "He's fully conscious now, Paul. His eyes are open."

Richelieu awoke in a daze, raising himself up on his elbow and staring at the blazing walls which had burned low enough to allow the Hudson's Bay men to dart in and scoop snow upon the flames with their long snowshoes used as shovels.

"Name of a name!" he blurted, unable to

comprehend the crimson glare, the shovelling figures of the men, and the hiss of the snow masses smothering the fire. "I dreamed I was on the brink of hell. *Comment?* Has my dream come true?"

"Partly," explained Carlisle, grimly striding over to him. "Your men set fire to your post and scattered to the thirty-two points of the north when they heard you had smallpox!"

"Smallpox!" echoed Richelieu, unbelievably.

"Yes, the Red Death! Cotameg's dunnage-bag came back to you among the food-sacks."

Richelieu's lips parted stiffly, but Carlisle poised his moccasined foot as if to spurn him into the dying conflagration.

"Don't say a word, Richelieu!" he warned, passionately. "Not a cursed word, or in you go!"

Richelieu closed his lips again, and Carlisle dropped his foot.

"I guess we'll get a toboggan and run him across to Cumberland House," he told Andrews. "Eugene, run and fetch it. I'll set aside one of my buildings for him alone."

"Condemnation, no, you won't, Carlisle!" expostulated Wayne. "I've no love for you as I said, but I'm a white man. None of your Hudson's Bay traders has been exposed to infection. We six Free-Traders have. Besides, I've had it. Andrews has had it. So we'll take Andrews and Richelieu to Fort Wayne with us. Richelieu can be put in the fur house. We'll use the trading-room, and Andrews may have my own quarters."

"By Jove, you are a white man, Wayne!"

accepted Carlisle, his face lighting up. "I wouldn't have asked it of you, but I take your offer in the spirit in which it's given."

"There's a little selfishness in it," Wayne confessed. "I would go crazy if Joan were near any infection, and you'll have to give her quarters at Cumberland House. Send your men over now to my post for her stuff and the furs and everything but the bare necessities we'll use. They can gut the buildings before we go into them. And about the furs, you'll keep them in trust only, so that there will be no trouble over them!"

"All right," agreed Carlisle, heartily, hastening to issue his orders and to direct Drummond to place the toboggan he had brought so that Richelieu might roll onto it. "And, Wayne, I'll leave you a load of provisions at your palisade gate."

"Thanks," nodded Wayne. "I'll take them in the spirit they're given."

He passed with his five Free-Traders through the gateway. Andrews, Drummond, Galt, and the other Hudson's Bay men followed after, drawing Richelieu upon the toboggan. Carlisle turned from a last inspection of the smoking post ruins and gave Joan his hand for the run across the snows to Cumberland House.

"We, too, are in isolation," he observed with a whimsical laugh. "Do you happen to care, Joan?"

She gave him a tantalizing smile as they raced side by side.

"As long as I can go to my father's stockade every day, talk to him, and know that he is all right, I—why, I expect to be very comfortable in Cumberland House," she evaded, naively. "And do you know what I'm going to make you do the very minute we get there, Paul?"

"What?" he challenged.

"Cook me a full-course dinner!" Joan decreed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

OOCHEMEGOU KESIGOW

THE full tale of the fight of the Sturgeon Lake Northwesters and Free-Traders did not come down the Saskatchewan to Carlisle for several weeks. Christmas Day passed without the arrival of any of his Indian trappers, but about three o'clock on New Year's Day the jingle of bells brought him and Joan running to the door.

A grand Cree cavalcade they beheld, toboggans and carioles drawn by gaily-caparisoned dogs with bead-worked blankets on their backs and bells upon their collars. Pottering in the rear, the squaws drove the teams with the duffle, children and furs packed into the carioles, but the hunters sped in front, gorgeous in their new capotes and leggings fringed with porcupine quills.

At Carlisle's beckoning they trooped up to the steps where he stood, led by old Soaring Eagle, a chief of the tribes and one of the best fur-takers on his books.

"It is Oochemegou Kesigow—the New Year's—the Kissing Day of the Crees, when every man is supposed to kiss every woman in sight—Factor," Soaring Eagle greeted, "and we are here according to our custom."

"That is good, Soaring Eagle," returned Carlisle, gravely, albeit there was a twinkle in his eye as his glance met Joan's. "There is a gift for each one of you at the store when you trade your furs. How was the catch?"

"We took much fur, Factor," reported Soaring Eagle, "but we will take no more in that upper country. After the trade and feast we will hunt toward the Wenipak. The Red Death is raging yonder, and we fear it stalking through our teepees."

"Where, Soaring Eagle?" demanded Joan, anxiously. "Where is it raging?"

"Where roams the wind, Golden Daughter? Where fall the forest leaves? The Red Death is killing out the posts and tribes of the French Company and the Free-Trading men as red fire runs among the trees. So my far-journeying tribesmen bring the word."

"It hasn't got among our own Indians, then, or into our own posts?" asked Carlisle with concern.

"No," declared Soaring Eagle, "for the struggle among the companies has been bitter and nothing but rifle balls has passed between. But the tribes of the Hudson's Bay Company in the other districts are fearful even as we. They are fleeing from the Red Death, going east toward James Bay, south upon the prairie, or north to the Barren Lands."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Carlisle. "That means the closing of those posts. Are there no districts free from it at all?"

"The tales of the Indian runners say that it

has not spread as far as Fort des Prairies yet nor to the Athabasca, but that all posts are closed against newcomers."

Carlisle pointed toward Richelieu's dismantled post.

"There's where the Red Death started, Soaring Eagle," he informed.

"So ran the story of those who fled among the Indians and posts of the other districts," nodded the old chief.

"And there," went on Carlisle, pointing to Fort Wayne, "the Northwest leader is sick with it. There the Free-Trade leader watches by the bed of Mason, the only one left alive of five faithful men. There our praying man is with them, all under the plague."

"So," nodded Soaring Eagle, unmoved.

"You are not afraid?"

"I am not afraid, Factor. If it was not good for us to come, you would have sent a runner to warn us. We are here, and after the feast we trail to the Wenipak."

"It is well," concluded Carlisle. "Go to the store now and Galt will give you your gifts."

"It is Oochemegou Kesigow," reminded Soaring Eagle, looking at Joan.

Carlisle's eyes twinkled again, but Joan was equal to the occasion.

"I kiss you all," she spoke in Cree, touching her finger-tips to her lips and tossing them the caress.

Soaring Eagle and the others gravely acknowledged the salute, catching the kiss in mid-air

on their own finger-tips and carrying it to their mouths; then they stalked off to the store.

Carlisle backed hastily indoors under Joan's indignant assault.

"You wanted him to say it," she accused. "Just wait till you have to salute all the greasy squaws! But, seriously, Paul, isn't it horrible news?"

"It's very bad," admitted Carlisle, with a shake of his head. "Yet don't let it spoil our New Year's dinner, Joan. I wouldn't care about myself, but I want Lewis and the men of the other posts to enjoy themselves. You see it's the only break for them in the whole winter."

"I won't let the news spoil it," she promised. "Though there's fear in my heart!"

"Fear of what?"

"Fear that it means the end of my father's already shaken power!"

"I don't know," Carlisle deftly hedged. "I can't tell anything about it till I get word how things stand in the other districts from official quarters. The governor promised when I left James Bay to have a message routed through before spring to let me know the exact situation. But hurry, Joan. It will soon be dark, and the men will be over from the store."

Joan hastened about, directing the work of the two young Cree maids in the kitchen, putting the finishing touches upon her New Year's dinner spread upon the long table in the Factor's council-room, and while he watched her gliding about, Carlisle marvelled at the miracle of a woman's

touch in softening the bare austerity of his former quarters.

He had given the house up to her entirely since the night Richelieu's post was wrecked and the rest went to Fort Wayne, to do with it what she willed.

He himself had taken business and sleeping quarters in Galt's trading-room with Galt and Drummond, and it was ever a source of pleasure to them to pass from that rough environment into this newly consecrated feminine sphere for their meals or to spend the long, storm-bitten winter evenings before the roaring birch logs of the fireplace.

The possessions transferred from Fort Wayne before it went under isolation she had used to garnish Cumberland House. Formerly Carlisle's council-room contained nothing but table and chairs, guiltless of any adornment. Now the bare planks of the floor were hidden under a plethora of fur rugs, skins of the wolf, lynx, black and grizzly bears; the bare walls were covered with curios, weapons of the savage tribes, antlers of the red deer, moose, and caribou, horns of mountain-sheep and musk-ox.

Her cushions, filled with downy wild-goose feathers, covered with leather in coloured patterns and trimmed with Indian bead-work, padded the chairs. Her couch, luxuriously fur-robed, invited lounging by the fireplace; her pictures decorated the mantel above.

In one corner stood her harpsichord, brought in by the Red River route from St. Paul, while

upon a shelved cabinet beside was piled her music and her library, a collection begun while schooling at St. Paul and added to at every opportunity—history, travel, poetry, French and Spanish novels which she read in the original.

Upon the table she hovered over in the deepening dusk of the room was arrayed her cherished linen, flat silverware, china, the magnificent silver tea-service and tall brass candelabra.

The latter she filled with candles, and as she lighted them, the Hudson's Bay officers came tramping over from the store, Drummond, Galt, Lewis in from the Pas, Lea from the Nepowin, Garry from Moose Lake, Hampton from Chima-wawin, Jarvis, from Grand Rapids, Wells from the Seepanock Channel.

"*Bonsoir*, Mademoiselle Wayne," greeted Drummond, opening the door in the lead, his volatile face a-quiver with suppressed merriment. "Wan happy New Year to you, an' I'm wondaire if you remembaire dis day be Oochemegou Kesigow?"

"Soaring Eagle told you, Eugene," flashed Joan, intuitively, breaking into laughter with them all. "But it shall never be said that I did less for white men than for red. You may kiss my hand, sir."

With the air of an old-world courtier Drummond bent over it, then all his companions, and Joan, with a queenly gesture, waved them to the table.

"The feast is ready; be seated, gentlemen," she directed.

She took her stately place behind the silver tea-service. Carlisle took his opposite her, beyond the branching candelabra, at the foot of the table, and the other officers ranged themselves on either side. Under the mellow candlelight they dined like true lords of the North in the presence of a gracious lady.

Course by course the quiet-footed Cree maids served the meal—soup of delicious moose meat, stewed ptarmigan breasts garnished with forest herbs, fish course of flaky lake trout, the savoury dressed goose, the Christmas pudding and cake, and the wines of Sicily and Madeira.

Then while the men lighted the fragrant company tobacco in their pipes, Joan stole away to her instrument, playing soft, dreamy airs that wafted like summer winds through the hazy incense of the room. As they smoked and listened, the officers gave their brief verbal reports to Carlisle: so much fur taken in trade, this and that incident in the post routine, such and such friction with the adherents of the rival companies.

Succinctly Garry told how a vagrant party of Free-Traders sacked two of his fur trains on Moose Lake. Lea described the looting of his Nepowin post by a tribe of the French Company's Indians and his struggle to save the greater part of the fur which he had managed to cache safely on the Saskatchewan by the mouth of Ptarmigan Creek.

Wells related how he had captured a Northwest guide forerouting the Seepanock Channel

for brigades in the spring and sent him southward on *La Longue Traverse* to the Assiniboine.

"But never fear, zur," Wells concluded in his broad wheeze, "they zhan't get through there I will zee to't."

Their tones were low so as not to raise discord in the music's harmony. Joan's playing was zephyr-like, unobtrusive as meditation, so as not to break the thread of their council. But as the talk lagged and lapsed, her music increased in volume, and the men heard the airs of their own lands swelling in their ears.

With magic interpretation she played them back to those lands, to the rugged Highlands, the English downs, the vineyards of sunny France. Their battle chants, their hymns of unction, their folk legends, their hearth songs, the songs that never die she played them, and their hearts went out to their far-off homes.

Galt drove an imaginary paddle down to the Sault, home of the white adventurer who had fathered him and his old mother of the Crees. Drummond lay sun-basking under the loom of the Pyrenees on the banks of the River Adour. Garry and Lea trod again their beloved Inverness and Cromarty. Hampton climbed his Devon hills. Jarvis saw and heard the colour and rattle of London. Wells stood under the waving trees upon the green lawns of the Squire's house. Lewis watched with his aged eyes the gray seas breaking upon the foamy crags which whelped him, in his nostrils the salted fog, in his soul the void that runs:

From the dim shieling of the misty island
Mountains divide us and a world of seas,
But still our hearts are true, our hearts are Highland,
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides.

On and on she played while they drifted in their dreams and Carlisle lay back in his chair before the fireplace watching her through the blue wreaths of his pipe smoke. Ethereal, intangible she seemed through the blur, the candle-light filtering softly on her spun-gold hair and golden satin dress and striking the facets of a few choice rings upon her nimble fingers.

For him, too, her magic was potent. He was a little boy again in the post of Niagara; his was the boyish vision of its pageants and alarms; and his was the boyish memory of his father, tall, straight, handsome in the dashing uniform of a captain of the Rangers—all in that old day before his mother died.

When the music ceased they did not know it till they saw Joan slipping off the stool and coming toward them through the haze.

"Isn't it time to start their dance, Paul?" she smiled. "You know I want to take my father his own New Year's dinner very soon."

"Yes, yes," assented Carlisle, returning from his childhood's vision and dropping his pipe ashes into the birch logs, "we'll go right over and set things going and then see about the dinner."

He helped her on with the beautiful ermine capote, its hood fringed with tails of the silver fox, and they followed the men across to the store buildings and into the trading-room.

The trading-room was full of whites, breeds, and Indians of both sexes waiting expectantly. They, like Carlisle's officers, had feasted to the full, and now they were ready for the merriment.

The room was cleared for the occasion, benches ranged round the sides, and the walls and ceiling lined with bright red calico and hung with the New Year's decorations of evergreens and scarlet swamp berries. Upon Galt's counter were placed three chairs for the musicians, high up under the burning candles upon the shelves.

One of these chairs Galt took himself with his violin. Drummond and Jarvis climbed up on either side of him with bass viol and piccolo. The crowd upon the floor at Carlisle's direction resolved itself into couples, forming a Circassian circle round the room, and to the vamping of the violin strings the dance was on.

Buoyantly, madly, they danced, all their spirits—congealed through long, lonely months—melting instantly in the warmth of human companionship and effervescing in flourish, laughter, and shout. Though Carlisle and Joan withdrew after the first dance, the gaiety did not pause. They had given it the necessary impetus. The feet of joyous abandon were loosed.

While they watched a little, the square dances, string dances, and round dances shuttled in quick succession. The musicians changed, the instruments changed, violin, viol, and piccolo giving way to mandolin, tambourine, or bagpipes, but the tide of music and restless muscles flowed perpetually.

One moment it was Galt leading the Feather Dance of the tribes; the next, Drummond banging the tambourine he had learned from his Spanish neighbours and reeling a Spanish whirl; or, again, Lewis strutting the length of the room, his droning bag under his arm, skirling away on the pipes to the Highland steps.

From that carnival of colour and movement Carlisle and Joan were never missed when they stole unostentatiously back to the Factor's house. The Cree maids had cleared the table, but according to Joan's instructions they had reserved a choice portion of each course, enough for Wayne and Andrews and Mason if he should have the heart to taste the soup or nibble a ptarmigan breast.

It was packed in a large-lidded basket woven of willow by the Cree weavers, all ready to be warmed up and eaten, and Carlisle, adding a bottle of wine and a canister of tobacco, hung the basket over his shoulder by its leather thong.

The sound of the dance echoed forth from the trading-room as they passed by and on along the fringe of trees toward the camp-fires of the Crees. Here in the shelter of the forest all those in from the trap lines had made open bivouac, snow-walled quadrangles scraped to earth, floored with spruce boughs and warmed by abundant fires.

A few old squaws, too old to care for the revelry in the post, were tending the fires, while around the blaze sprawled many groups of wolf-dogs, stick-tied to prevent them wandering

or fighting, lying with feet outstretched to the heat or worming forward luxuriously upon their bellies.

Each team relaxed by themselves, snarling defiance at any inquisitive encroacher from a strange outfit and baring fangs in meteor-like leap and retreat at the end of their leashes. On one side of the fire in the end quadrangle which they skirted an especially large five-dog team lay by an up-ended cariole, and Carlisle pointed them out to Joan.

"Those big Hudson's Bays are Soaring Eagle's dogs," he informed her. "Aren't they splendid brutes? They weigh one hundred and fifty pounds apiece, and they're the fastest dogs in my district."

The Cree camp-fires winked fainter behind them, and they neared the palisades of Fort Wayne. Upon the snows in front of the entrance they could see a black figure pacing up and down and dancing on his snowshoes to keep warm, the Indian guard posted there to prevent curious huskies from clawing a way under the gate or unwarned hunters from inadvertently stumbling into the plague.

"Blow your whistle, Burning Cloud," ordered Carlisle, when the guard challenged.

Burning Cloud with a grunt of recognition complied, sending a shrill screeching note through the frosty air, the signal for Wayne to come to the entrance. The gate had been fitted with an outside bar for greater facility in handling, and this Burning Cloud withdrew, swinging the barrier wide. The yellow blotch of an

opened door showed in the post, with Wayne's fur-capped head touching the top of the seven-foot doorway as he emerged.

"Paul, are you going to tell him about his posts and Indians?" Joan whispered while Wayne, wrapped in a big bearskin coat, crunched across the yard.

"I don't know," Carlisle replied. "I thought I might if he asked. Why?"

"Don't tell him," she pleaded. "You know his nature, all gloom and bitterness, and through no moulding of his own! He's had too much to bear already with the cutting off of his trade, semi-starvation, the loss of his post men, and this hateful isolation here. Now a new calamity would lie like a mountain on his spirit to weight him down. Please don't tell him, Paul—yet!"

"I won't, then, Joan," he agreed. "You know I don't want to heap trouble on him. Hello, Wayne," calling cheerily to the Free-Trader, "a happy New Year to you! That sounds like mockery, but I mean as happy as the circumstances allow. Thanks to Joan, we had a real New Year's dinner at Cumberland House, and she's brought you your share."

He stepped forward in the gateway and hung the basket on a wooden pin.

"The same to you, Carlisle!" greeted Wayne, with simulated cheerfulness, taking the basket down by its thong. "And you, girl! I knew you wouldn't forget me."

"No, no, father, I couldn't forget you, and I

wish this imprisonment were all over. But if you're going to talk a while, take the basket inside first. The food was warm when we left but it will soon freeze."

"Yes, it'll soon freeze," nodded Wayne, somewhat absently, "but I'll take it inside in a moment. I wanted to ask about your hunters, Carlisle. We saw them making in to the post to-day, and I thought they might have heard some news of my own men from my Indians. Where they in touch with my tribes at all?"

"No," answered Carlisle, truthfully enough, "my hunters haven't been in touch with your Indians. They didn't pass any word with them or with the Northwesters' tribes."

"Ah!" sighed Wayne, in disappointment. "I didn't know. I thought perhaps they might have. But no matter, I'll send them word that the plague will soon be over and they'll be in shortly with their fur."

"Mason's getting better, then, father?" cried Joan, eagerly. "I'm so glad!"

"Better?" echoed Wayne, with gloomy shake of his head. "He died at dark!"

"High Heaven!" breathed Carlisle, while Joan clutched his arm with a sob trembling in her throat. "That's hard, Wayne. That's too abominably hard—the last of your five!"

"Condemnation, yes!" exclaimed Wayne, a wave of rebellious despair rising through his gloomy apathy. "Why couldn't the plague have taken some of those treacherous curs who ran away, and left me my five true men? By

the Doom, Carlisle, I sometimes wonder if there is any——”

“Hush, father, don’t say that!” beseeched Joan, divining what was in his mind.

“What about Richelieu?” asked Carlisle, by way of diversion. “Is he getting along as well as he was?”

“Yes, he is. There’s more irony for you. The wound in his neck is healed, and he’s practically over the fever although he complains of weakness in the back and won’t move much off his chair. Why couldn’t my honest Mason be convalescing in his place, and why couldn’t the cursed murderer of Mason and the rest be carried out into the forest to-night?”

“You’re going to take them out to-night, then?”

“Yes, Andrews says it should be done at once so as to kill all further risk, and he also says we’ll have to take fresh clothes and cleansing baths and then put a torch to the post. It’s impossible to clean it and I can soon rebuild with plenty of logs at hand.

“Yes, they must go out to-night. The other four bodies are in the fur house. Andrews and I will carry them, of course, but—but could I ask you to make things ready out there, Carlisle?”

“Yes, Wayne, yes—certainly!” agreed Carlisle. “I’ll go right over to Cumberland House and get the men. You’ll have time to eat your dinner before we’re ready.”

“Thanks, Carlisle. I haven’t much appetite,

but I can't refuse what my girl has prepared. And you'd better stay at the post, Joan. You'd better not come into the forest. It'll be no sight for young eyes like yours!"

"Still, I'll come, father!" declared Joan. "I would always regret it if I didn't. I loved them all, just as you did."

"Well, well, whatever you think, girl!" he nodded, turning back into the post. "In about an hour or so!"

The dance was swinging, the music thrilling, vibrant, lusty, care-free when Carlisle and Joan returned to the trading-room of Cumberland House, but a word to Galt and the shuffling feet stilled, the violins ceased with a whine of protest.

Seizing their outer garments, the men followed the chief trader, many taking torches and axes from the store. Lewis, at Carlisle's request, put his bagpipes under his arm, and all poured out across the snow to the big clearing in the woods where the winter's fuel had been gathered.

There they set to work under Galt, laying dry branches in layers, each layer crossing at right angles the one beneath as in the end towers of the near-by piles of cordwood. Upon the branches they heaped the cordwood itself, lengths of dry, dead birch and resinous pine—slivery, pitch-soaked, extremely inflammable, bulking hugely high above men's heads.

When the work was nearly finished Joan and Carlisle crossed to the gate of the Free-Trade post to tell Wayne all was ready, but he and Andrews were at that moment coming out of the

fur-house doorway which Richelieu held open for them.

The Northwester could see the two at the entrance, but he offered no greeting. Silently he held the door out of the way and shambled up the steps, with an axe handle used as a cane to support his weak limbs; closing the door again when Wayne and Andrews inched forth their pole stretcher with the long, still figure upon it.

"Is he coming, father?" whispered Joan.

"No, thank Heaven!" gritted Wayne. "He says it's too cold and too far for him to walk."

Five times they made the out trip, four times the back trip, before the row of bodies upon the pile of cordwood was complete. Then Carlisle's men touched torches to the bottom branches in many places and stepped back as Andrews began to read the burial service.

The flames mounted and grew, reddening the snow, silhouetting the forest trees, painting the white and Indian faces staring up at the five fever-shattered, pox-pitted, rigescent bodies of men who had been true.

The world turned back a thousand years, and like a pagan crowd of ancients the motley horde of Northmen watched the funeral pyre blaze. Men and women alike thronged about, all of Cumberland House, all of the Cree tribes, even the old squaws whose mission it was to tend the fires in the bivouacs. The only two souls missing were Richelieu, shut up alone in Fort Wayne, and Burning Cloud, guarding its open gate.

Andrews' "Amen" rang out sonorously.

Across the momentary silence that followed trembled the throbbing of the fire, Joan's stifled sobbing, the wailing of Lewis' dirge, the weird death chant of the Cree women, while overhead sounded the solemn harp of the aurora, some unseen Hand pulsating its golden strings!

"Hoo—ah—h—h! Hoo—ah—h—h!" the squaws quavered.

They mourned these true men as they mourned their own dead of the tribes, and their wailing shrilled eerily in the ears of Wayne and Andrews, of Joan and Carlisle, plodding back in pairs toward Fort Wayne.

Of the four Carlisle was the most mentally alert. His was the first observant glimpse of the Fort Wayne gate, and as he glimpsed it, he gave a startled exclamation and leaped forward in front of the others. No tall, dark form showed in sentinel pose in the opening, but prone upon the snow lay the sprawling figure of a man.

"Burning Cloud!" burst out Carlisle as he bent over and examined him. "Stunned with an axe handle! Look—there it is beside him in the snow!"

"By the Doom!" exploded Wayne, rushing up with the rest. "It's Richelieu's work. The shamming skunk! Too cold for him to go into the forest! Too far to walk, eh? Condemnation, he's been biding his time, just waiting his chance, Carlisle, and I've given it to him."

"But where under the dome of heaven does he hope to hide, Paul?" demanded Andrews, breathlessly.

Carlisle was reading the signs. He saw where Burning Cloud had been standing upon a drift, the toes of his snowshoes pointing forestward, no doubt staring at the distant glare of the funeral pyre and listening to the death chant of his people when he was struck down by a blow from behind.

His rifle and snowshoes were gone, and Carlisle, bent double as he scanned the crust, nosed about like a hound to find the tracks of the shoes striking out from the muddle of prints about the gateway.

They were the long, slim shoes of the Cree runner. There had been no others like them near Fort Wayne that day, and presently Carlisle discovered where they had struck the softer snows in a scent-breaking, fifteen-foot jump out from the packed area about the entrance.

"No weak man's jump, that!" he pointed out to the rest. "And those strides aren't the strides of a weak man, either!"

He indicated the marks of Richelieu's shoes where the Northwester had run upon the tracks he and Joan had made in coming over from Cumberland House. It was plain that Richelieu's purpose had been to confuse trails and throw any tracker off the scent, but Carlisle was never at fault.

He skimmed rapidly ahead, Joan gliding at his side, Wayne and Andrews keeping their distance farther back but equally anxious to see the results of the trailing.

The tracks led straight toward the Cree biv-

ouacs, toward the snow-walled quadrangles glowing pink under the blazing fires within.

"He's hiding in the teepees somewhere, Joan," breathed Carlisle, "waiting till the woods are clear. You'd better drop back. He's armed, and he'll likely shoot on sight."

Then Carlisle's shoes struck the snowbanked side of the end quadrangle, sending the flakes hissing into the fire, and instantaneously the truth struck home to him. There had not been a hunter or a squaw in the whole camp to menace or alarm a pillager.

Soaring Eagle's dogs, the splendid 150-pound Hudson's Bays, the swiftest dogs in Carlisle's district, the animals no other post team could pretend to overtake, were gone from their former place by the fire.

Soaring Eagle's up-ended cariole, too, was gone, and yonder was the white furrow of it streaking off in the direction that led up the Saskatchewan.

"Escaped!" breathed Joan. "But be careful, Paul. Maybe he has spread the plague here as he tried to do once before!"

"No, thank Heaven, his tracks don't go any farther than this fire. He hadn't time to enter the main bivouac, you see, Joan. It took him all his time to get the harness on those five big brutes and get away. He has barely done it, for the cariole furrow hasn't yet hardened in the frost!"

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SORCERY OF SPRING

WINTER's waning they sensed first in the flutter of ptarmigan flocks back from the Takipi Hills, in the drift of the phantom caribou herds down from the Barren Lands, in the lengthening days, the receding horizon which drew away into infinite remoteness, the rampant winds which snow-smoked that far horizon but died in a strange vacuum over the bosom of Pine Island Lake itself.

All about Cumberland House the Northern world burned incandescent, lurid; shot through and through, earth, air, and sky, with weird shafts of colour. The snows were billowy seas of coral with the bloody sunsets lying on them like islands of rubies.

The atmosphere was a mystic veil, to-day a shower of diamond dust, to-morrow a silver vapour, the next day the gossamer cloak of a sleeping glacier chrysoberyl-stained upon a web of hoar frost. And sheer from the dome of heaven to the line of the snows banked the deep purple clouds, like regal hangings in an ancient temple with the mock suns peering through as eyes of the priests of the sacrifice were wont to peer.

Yet there came no vernal transition, no slow travail of nature bringing forth new life. Only the purple tapestries and the peering eyes dissolved one day, and in their place floated turquoise skies and cirrous clouds painted with the eeriest sight Northern eyes may see.

Joan was the first to notice, straying to the door of the Factor's house while her father, Andrews, and Carlisle talked and smoked the bright evening away before the fireplace in the council-room.

Now the sun set late. Jealous daylight claimed many hours of the former dark, and upon this evening the low sun was screened behind a fan of ground fog shooting up a half circle of crimson spokes rimmed by a golden felloe. Yet it was not the fantastic sunset but the weird sky itself that called forth Joan's excited cry and brought the others to her side.

"Look!" she murmured in a tone of awe. "Did you ever see such unnatural beauty?"

"By Heavens, a mirage!" exclaimed Carlisle. "A mirage of the South!"

For before their uplifted eyes, as if it lay out yonder upon the bare snows or just over the needle-tufted pines, stretched the open waters of the Great Lakes and the verdant land to the southward. What a charm of colour, what a mellow sweep of warmth they beheld!

Chrysoprase green the waters shimmered, frothed with the crests of the surges, edged with the pearly foam of pounded beaches, while afar spread the silver ribbons of rivers, the fat,

grassed fields, the groves of leafed trees, the acres of orchard bloom. Almost could they hear the cries of children at play under the showering petals, catch the drone of the hived bees, feel the hot-lipped southern winds kissing their faces like the passionate caress of their own febrile Chinook.

"It's spring!" declared Carlisle. "It's blossomy spring down there."

"Yes, it's spring on the Wyoming Valley—see!" urged Wayne, his fawn-green eyes burning raptly, his abnormally long arm pointing out his homeland in the sky picture as one would lay a finger upon an unrolled map. "It's spring, and it's a sign. By the Doom, a sign that I'm going back!"

Carlisle and Andrews were silent.

The tears flooded to Joan's eyes.

They all stared mutely while the mirage faded as quickly as it had appeared and sombre clouds slipped over with the motion of a hand wiping away the drawing from a slate.

Wayne's eye went dark with the sky. He groped for the doorway as they turned inside and sat down in his chair before the fireplace, his head in his hands, gazing into the glowing embers as one who sees old scenes in pageant.

Within an hour the rain came—the warm, steaming, smiting rain that had lurked for weeks in the purple cloud banks, and all night it poured, gushed, fell in torrents, sweeping the snows like a magic broom, brimming ice-bound lake and river with the leaping waters of life.

Companioning it came the Chinook, stealing a march in the dark, ravishing the naked woods, stirring the pulse primordial in the heart of the waking earth.

Morning revealed a world aflood, the ice jams flying, the Saskatchewan in rampage, hurling the glut of a thousand streams down to Lake Winnipeg. Spring! It burst like prison doors for prisoners long confined. It came like a swift reprieve to mourners of one doomed. Spring! The air was one vast flyway of wild-fowl winging north.

As rivers run to the sea, as men seek their own hearth fires, so these whizzing wedges returned to the nests that fledged them, the ducks to their million marshes, the Canada geese to their Hudson Bay shores, the wavies to their nameless Arctic islands.

While the ice runs reeled along, the willows budded beside them. While the muskegs shed their frozen skins, the wild rose clothed their starkness. While the melting snows uncarpeted the forest floor, the nymph-like flowers spread over it their rugs of matchless hue. Spring! The incomparable thrill and verve and urge of it! It surged in all living things from the human occupants of Cumberland House to the singing bluebirds in the tree-tops and the whining mosquitoes in the swamp.

The breaking of the forest trails meant the cutting off of all communication in the Northland till the floods had subsided sufficiently for the frail canoes to breast them. Carlisle had

had no word from James Bay. If word had not been sent out by trippers before the snows broke, it might not arrive in time to let him know the situation in the other districts. The lack of such knowledge was a severe handicap.

The governor always kept his promises strictly and he wondered what had happened to prevent a message getting through. But even while he worried, a lone Indian canoeman, daring the running ice, drove up the Saskatchewan over the lessening flood and threw a dispatch bag upon Carlisle's desk.

"You are Flaming Torch from the bay post of York Factory," identified Carlisle, scanning him keenly, "but you have not come from the bay by canoe. I know that."

"No," explained Flaming Torch, "I came by dog team. The trail was slow with the melting snows, and the floods caught me at the Pas. I had to wait for the ice to run. Then I came on with a canoe from the post."

"Stay here," Carlisle directed him. "I may have a message to send back right away."

He knew Wayne and Andrews were out somewhere along the swollen river, so he took the dispatches over to his house to have privacy while reading them, but when he opened the council-room door Joan sat there.

"What is it, Paul?" she asked, looking up from the book she was reading.

"Dispatches," he replied with satisfaction. "I've looked for them a long time. Don't let me disturb you, though. Go on with your read-

ing. I'll just glance over them and get the news."

Most of them were documents of the ordinary post routine, things that would come under the jurisdiction and execution of Galt and his clerks, but finally he came to one of greater import.

The sweeping chirography he recognized as the governor's own handwriting, and it was addressed: Chief District Factor Carlisle, Cumberland House, Cumberland District, via Norway House. Also it was marked *Important*, and Carlisle tore it open with eager hands. It was written in conversational style, and the body of it ran:

All the Upper Country is a hell of smallpox! Between that and trade war, all of the Free-Trade and the majority of the Northwest posts are wiped out. As far as the latest dispatches by runners point out, the Northwest posts of James and Roderick McKenzie, McLeod, McDougall, Todd, McGillivray, and Sager are the only ones left. These posts are very strong, as many of the other posts evacuated and fell in on them.

I have temporarily closed all our posts in the infected districts and freighted out the fur by the Churchill River, using dog teams for the purpose before the river broke. The Northwesters have made no move, and beyond a doubt the McKenzies and the rest will try to come down the Saskatchewan as usual in the spring.

You must stop them. They must not go through. I hope you are strong enough as you stand and have escaped the plague. If not, I can perhaps get you reinforcements up in time. Everything here on the bay is much the same. The past winter has been a severe one, and it may be I shall not endure another. My health is failing greatly, and I think I may ask for a change in the spring. Let me know your prospects by the runner who carries this!

As Carlisle raised his eyes from his reading he caught the gaze of Joan bent upon him across the table.

"What is the news, Paul?" she asked, earnestly. "Is it betraying confidences or trade secrets to tell me?"

"No, Joan, there's nothing in it you shouldn't know about," he assured her, handing the dispatch over the board. "You may read it for yourself. I'm sorry it confirms our worst news about your father's posts. Soaring Eagle's words were true. They're all gone, it seems. The Northwesters fared somewhat better."

Joan quickly read the dispatch, and Carlisle saw the soft gleam of commiseration spring into her eyes.

"I was afraid—so dreadfully afraid!" she exclaimed. "Now I know. I know what I haven't the heart to tell him. But it doesn't make any mention of Richelieu, Paul. Do you think he'll have reached any of these posts that remain unaffected?"

"He has certainly reached one of them," Carlisle emphatically declared. "He had the very best of dogs, and it wouldn't take him long to reach, say, Todd's post."

"Then perhaps he'll warn them not to come down the Saskatchewan. Perhaps they'll try some other ruse or else hold their furs over for another year."

Carlisle shook his head.

"They won't do that," he prophesied. "Furs held over are not so profitable as if marketed at

once. Then, they have to go to Grande Portage for next year's supplies. Besides, Richelieu is a bully and a fighter, no coward whatever. Nobody need warn him off, and he won't warn anybody else off.

"Even if any of the other partners object and want to play a safer game, he'll smash their objections. I know Simon Richelieu. He'll come, and he'll have all the Northwest brigades under his command. Further than that, Joan, don't you realize how much depends on my scattering his brigades here? If I should lose——"

"Don't, Paul; don't mention that possibility!" cried Joan.

She was half out of her chair, her face all flushed, leaning over the table toward him, her hands planted on the litter of dispatches.

"Don't mention it, please! It would bring misfortune, I'm sure. I've learned to be superstitious in this North, you see. Yes, I was a fool to say he wouldn't come. He will come. And Paul, Paul—you must not lose!"

Carlisle's fingers closed on hers, outspread upon the papers.

"By the God of Northmen, Joan," he vowed, "I will not lose!"

The magnetic pressure of his hands told more than the mere words. Joan, with a radiant smile, slowly withdrew her hands and dropped back into her chair, still following his movements with her eyes as he set about writing the answer to the governor's dispatch.

When he had finished he looked up.

"Would you like to read it, Joan?" he asked.

"Yes, I would like to, Paul," she confessed, "that is, if it is the same as the other—if it is proper that I should read it."

"It's all right for you to see it, girl. Here!"

Joan took the paper and read:

I have your dispatch via Norway House, although it was somewhat delayed en route. The break-up of the river caught the courier at the Pas, and he had to lie up with the dogs and come on at the first opportunity by canoe. This circumstance would have made it a question whether reinforcements could have reached here in time had I needed them, but luckily I do not.

Besides my own men, Galt's strong following which was here when I arrived, and the crews of the two fleets of York boats whom I have retained, I am drawing in all the forces of the other posts with all the Indians of those sections. The Indians are loyal and numerous, and thus I shall have a preponderance of men. As regards the smallpox, it has been here. In fact, it started here in a manner I shall explain when I reach James Bay.

Both Northwesters and Free-Traders fled from it, burning Richelieu's post as they fled, except Richelieu, Wayne, and five of Wayne's men. In isolation at Fort Wayne the five Free-Traders died with it, Richelieu recovering and managing to escape up the Saskatchewan. Fort Wayne we fired so as to leave no possibility of the disease spreading here.

I have given Wayne quarters at Cumberland House, although we thought it best not to tell him the extent of his losses yet, he is such a strange and moody man. There has been no infection at Cumberland House. Everything is in the usual shape, and fur has been plentiful. I shall stop the Northwest brigades here and then go down to Grande Portage.

The Northwesters have claimed the ground there and closed the Portage, and thus the Pigeon River route, to any

but their own voyageurs. I myself had to make a dash up the Kaministiquia coming in. You can understand that it is supremely in our interests to contest that claim without delay, before undisputed closing of it gives them excuse for holding it under a ruling of the corrupt Montreal courts.

So I shall pass over the ground to avoid the claim and come home to the bay via the Michipicoten, the Missinabie, and the Moose. I am sorry to hear you have been troubled in health but trust to find you much improved when next I pay my respects.

“Well, Joan?” he questioned when she looked up with the light of surprise upon her face.

“You are going down to Grande Portage, Paul? I thought you would go down to James Bay by the Hayes River?”

“No,” he responded, “if I stopped Richelieu’s brigades here and then went down the Hayes, my work would be only half done. I am going to open up Grande Portage, and by the God of Northmen, Joan, you are going with me!”

That day the courier Flaming Torch departed down the river. The next day the men of the other posts came up, Lewis from the Pas, Lea from the Nepowin, Garry from Moose Lake, Hampton from Chimawawin, Jarvis from Grand Rapids.

They brought all the Indians of their sections to add to Carlisle’s strength, and Jarvis, his Cockney nose tilted skyward in pride, drove up with his own crew the Factor’s great craft which had been left at Grand Rapids when the river froze.

“See the bloomin’ Rajah ride!” he grinned,

doffing his cap to the crowd on shore. "Some d'y I'll command one of my own. Just mark wot I s'y."

He had with him Soaring Eagle's tribe—the up-Saskatchewan Indians who had elected to hunt about Lake Winnipeg when driven out by the plague—laden with a fresh catch of fur. The fur went in in trade, and these were the busy hours, hours filled with life and movement, sound and colour after the ghostly desolation and silence of the winter.

Never an hour went by, day or night, but some new fleet of canoes touched prows upon the Pine Island Lake shore, some new family pitched camp and swelled the teepee city round about Cumberland House.

Out of the eastern and western arms they came, off the Sturgeon and the Carrot rivers, from Lakes Namew, Amisk, Goose, Athapuscow, foregathering after custom immemorial, spiralling the blazing skies with their camp smokes, filling the balmy air with liquid language that lisped like the moist spring wind or gurgled like the waters.

They were all in, every man upon the trade books, every Hudson's Bay hunter in the district with their squaws, papooses, dogs, and household gods. The only outpost remaining was Wells's camp on the Seepanock Channel.

Wells's men Carlisle had not drawn in like the others. On the contrary, he had added to the Seepanock Channel force, bidding Wells redouble his vigilance with the opening of the

stream and giving him explicit orders as to what course he must pursue when the Northwesters came down.

Nor was the significance of these preparations lost upon Wayne. They marked, as it were, the breaking of the truce enforced between him and Carlisle by the smallpox outbreak. They loomed upon his conception as a final menace to his interests and he became morose, moody, brooding over Carlisle's actions and his ancient wrongs, watching for the Free-Trading brigades he hoped to see come driving down the Saskatchewan, and grimly waiting for that moment when there would be no further truce and he and Carlisle must decisively settle accounts.

The ice run was practically past. Vagrant flocks spun by on the turgid waters, but their very solitary journeying told Carlisle that the mighty highway was open. Even back to the tiniest feeders in the foothills of the Rockies the way was clear, and the Northwesters were doubtless driving down. They might come by daylight or dark, to-day, to-morrow; there was no telling, but it was well to be prepared.

Carlisle went up to the Seepanock Channel and personally posted Wells's men both in the hills across the Saskatchewan and in the low scrub round the channel opening itself. A mile inland the channel had been heavily barricaded as a necessary precaution, but no evidence of Hudson's Bay forces being in possession was visible from the main stream.

"Keep out of sight," Carlisle adjured Wells.

"Don't let them get a glimpse of any of your men. If they enter the channel, rush and hold them till I can get up the river to help you. If they go by, make sure that it is not a ruse and then follow them on to me as fast as you can."

"Yez, Factor," Wells assured him, "I zhall make zertain o' that. You zhall zee!"

Carlisle dropped down stream again below the muddle of straggling islands, below the scramble of rapids, below the twisted knot of river bends known as the Coiled Snakes, to a spot where the Saskatchewan narrowed not a great distance from Cumberland House.

Here the park lands met the ruder forest in a series of rolling bluffs and low plateaus, a bold promontory crowding the river into a twisted, sombre chasm. Close by the rim of the chasm and up on the slopes shouldered the jostling spruce, and against these high trees Carlisle sent his men with their axes.

To the swinging steel the spruce trees swung and snapped, plunging like the thrown spears of Titans into the river beneath. They criss-crossed and lodged and jammed, piling trunk on trunk, seining the vagrant flocs that drifted down, forming a stubborn wall against the angry, roaring river.

The dammed flood rose a foot, two feet, three feet; but the matted barrier held, while, high above, Carlisle and his axemen rained down the trunks till the sullen tide backed round the face of the promontory and gave up the fight. Beaten, it slunk out the easier way, over the bank

through the Devil's Elbow, a broad, barren valley that seemed to have been an ancient beaver meadow.

Owing to the width of the valley the yellow flood flowed no deeper than a man's waist, sweeping in a majestic curve of three miles or more back to the well-nigh-drained Saskatchewan's bed. As the waters rolled ruminatively through, they raised something inch by inch upon their rippling surface, a dark line across the molten gold, a triple boom of logs securely roped to giant pines on either benchland.

Ralph Wayne heard the axes ringing, saw the Saskatchewan temporarily draining, and ran out to where Carlisle was at work. He glimpsed the dammed chasm, the boom of logs across the Devil's Elbow, and his fawn-green eyes blazed with their old inimical light into Carlisle's.

"Condemnation! You close the Saskatchewan, Carlisle?" he exploded.

"So it seems, Wayne," returned Carlisle, quietly.

"To my brigades?"

"No, to the Northwest brigades."

"But what's the difference? You close the waterway, and you stop all who travel down. By the Doom, do you think I will stand by and see it done?"

Carlisle's gray eyes looked steadily into Wayne's blazing ones where he stood upon the end of the boom, and as he gazed, the Factor seemed to see back into those far-gone years which had moulded the man so harshly.

With strange occult vision he saw the pall of smoke and the sweep of pillage through the Wyoming Valley and Wayne's long pilgrimage into the North with his child of four. He sensed the vision and dream that had lured Wayne in his loneliness to do what many another adventurer had failed to do, to blaze the trail of empire beyond the Missouri.

Carlisle saw, felt the greatness of Wayne's dissolving dream, and there was no enmity in his heart, nothing but regret and pity, and he laid an earnest hand on the Free-Trader's arm.

"On my honour, Wayne, this move has nothing to do with you!" he assured him.

"You won't try to hold my brigades, then?" flashed the incredulous Wayne. "You'll let them pass around when they come?"

Carlisle hesitated, then nodded, helplessly.

"If—if they come," he evaded, "I'll put out no hand to stop them."

"If!" blurted Wayne. "What in creation have you up your sleeve? Do you think my men aren't as loyal as yours? Just because some of the drunken curs joined in the rout like sheep when they got the smallpox scare, you needn't class them all as that. Look at Mason. Look at Murdock, and the rest. Had you ever truer men under your red flag?"

"No, none truer than those," admitted Carlisle. "None truer in all the world for that matter!"

Wayne shrugged his shoulders darkly as he turned away again.

"Then that settles it," he growled. "They'll come all right, and when they take passage through here, they take it for all time, Carlisle. Either that or——"

He finished his sentence with a shake of his head that was more sinister than any spoken threat.

Gravely, without answering his threat, Carlisle watched him striding back to the post before he turned to give final directions to his men. Some dozen he appointed to work in two shifts, walking the triple boom with poles in their hands deflecting the drifting ice so that it would squeeze under and leave the barrier clear.

The rest he split into two camps to bivouac upon the benchlands at either end of the boom, ready at the coming of the sleepless scouts he had posted here and there all the way up river to the Seepanock Channel. There was nothing more to be done but wait. The long twilight of the northern evening had crept in upon the completion of the day's work, and through the dusk Carlisle followed in Wayne's footsteps back to Cumberland House.

In the deepest dark before the dawn Wells's scout, Spotted Deer, a Cree Indian of tremendous endurance and skill, fell in upon him, breathless and sweating.

"They come!" he grunted in Cree, spent with his running. "Many canoes. Many voices of white men, the French Company's men singing to their paddles."

Instantly Wells struck fire with his flint and

steel to the dry birchbark heaped beside him on the hillside, and blew it into flame.

The flare was hidden by the bulge of the hill from any one up-river, but could be readily seen by an appointed eye in an appointed place down-river. As Wells strained his eyes into the dark, he caught the answering flare a mile or two below, a bright flame and unmistakable but no larger than a handful of fireflies held on high by a sportive boy.

Immediately Wells smothered his flame with earth, and far down he saw the second flare go out and knew that his message was speeding swifter than the swiftest bird.

All the way along the Saskatchewan from island to island, from headland to headland, from hill to hill the red eyes glowed and winked out in the dark, and the last one glared for Waseyawin stationed upon the steep benchland above the Hudson's Bay men's bivouacs. Swiftly Waseyawin lit his torch and waved it in answer. The far spark died in the gloom. He dashed the torch into the soft muck and bounded down the hillside.

"The men of Black-beard are coming!" he cried to the drowsy camp. "The sign of the fire flashed through the night to me. They will be here with the winged dawn. I, Waseyawin, have spoke it. Ae, and I go to tell the Factor."

Like wraiths the Hudson's Bay men arose from wherever they lay, from bough beds on the ground, from the canopy of the bushes, from the

tents spread in desperation to keep off the plague of mosquitoes.

They stepped forth, shadowy, vague, thronging like ghosts in the dark that would soon break to show the stern, bronzed faces of Northmen sculptured by the chisel of daring. Among them the chief trader Galt moved his heavily built body, ordering, directing, posting them in their allotted positions.

"Go across the valley, Eugene," he begged Drummond, "and let them know what we know. It is good to be ready when the Factor comes."

Amid the low, musical night roar of the waters flowing under the boom and the spaced thud of ice cakes smiting the logs, Drummond's moccasins pat-patted across on the wet bark. He gave the word to the polers as he passed, and, in a few minutes, more ghostly forms were thronging in the bivouac at the other end of the boom.

Waseyawin waited for none of these things. He ran as the deer run, the tang of the dank night air and the smell of the young earth throbbing in his nostrils and setting his primitive blood a-leap, making straight for Cumberland House.

Up the trampled shore he sped and through the sleeping city of teepees, setting the curs to howling and stirring the tribes from their dreaming of forest dreams. They cried out to him to know if he was Maunobosho or Nenaubosho stalking through the night, but he heeded them not.

Through the open gate of the palisades he darted and across the dark stockade ground. He knew there was no use in going to the Factor's house, for he had seen that only Wayne, his daughter, and Father Andrews were sleeping there. The Factor's bed was in the trading-room, and, dispensing with all custom in the urgency of the moment, Waseyawin sprang up the steps and opened the door.

Carlisle lay upon the temporary bed behind his desk, sunk in a deep sleep after the long day's toil. He did not hear the almost soundless feet of his bowsman, did not wake till he felt the Indian fingers laid softly and respectfully upon his cheek.

"*Koos koos kwa*, Factor!" cried Waseyawin. "Wake up! The eyes of fire winked through the dark to me, and after the eyes will the sun flash upon the paddles of the men of the French Company."

"It is well, Waseyawin," spoke Carlisle in Cree, mentally alert the moment he was awake. "Go among your people in their teepees and gather the hunters. Take them with you to the Devil's Elbow to strengthen my men. I will not be far behind you."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A SKIN FOR A SKIN

MAKING ready his weapons as he went, Carlisle ran forth from the trading-room. The stars were gone as he glanced upward. The sky was graying, and above the eastern forest-line the lemon forelights of the dawn were gleaming.

Outside the stockade the Indian teepees buzzed like a vast colony of bees. Waseyawin had already hurried the hunters away but their womenkind were hissing the news of impending trouble about and scurrying off to the slope above the Devil's Elbow where they might see their lords give battle. Carlisle's swift feet passed many of them on the way, and as he came to the steep of the benchland, the vivid picture of the valley below spread sharp and clear before his eyes.

Through the great gut of greening hills, along their scarred earth faces, rocky outcrops, and scrubby slopes, rolled the slumbrous sheet of golden-coloured water. Its vagrant flocs had found the gouged earth an easy place to lodge, and there shimmering acres of ice were stranded, ghostly white in the growing light. Above hung the furry buds and opened leaves of the willows, the lacy, climbing birches; and over all the regal, scornful spruce pricking stiffly into the lemon sky.

Clusters of tents marked the ends of the boom, drawn like a black triple cable across the golden flood and fretting it into a snarling line of foam where the flow plunged under. Round the tents and scattered across the long boom he marked his waiting forces, all the swarthy hunters Waseyawin had marshalled, all the Hudson's Bay white men, half-breeds, and resident Indians of Cumberland House and the other district posts.

Yonder was Waseyawin himself, moving on the boom with the snaky slouch of the Crees, Missowa the Ojibway standing tall, strong, straight as a lance.

There were all the rest of his officers posed on the logs, their physical characteristics infallibly betraying their identities even at that distance—Galt's stocky body, Drummond's eagle profile and raven hair, Lewis's hoary head, Lea's slim Highland figure, Jarvis's nervous shuffle, Hampton's fleshy bulk, Garry's squat limbs and flaming red beard.

Even as he looked, Carlisle saw Eugene point up the majestic curve of the Devil's Elbow, saw the hands of the row of men on the boom drop to their hips and belts and curl up under their armpits for the handy weapons. There was something coming on the rolling flood. The outjut of the pines across the shoulder of the slope shut out his own view of the curve, but Carlisle knew that Eugene and the rest had sighted their enemies.

In long, slipping, coasting strides he slid down

the benchland upon his wet moccasins and ran out on the boom beside his brigade leader.

"Ba gar, here dey be come!" shrilled Eugene, still pointing, and Carlisle sighted over his hand to glimpse the Northwest brigades sweeping round the promontory.

The jam of trees and ice in the narrow chasm was not the first jam they had avoided in their long journey down that roaring waterway. They followed the Saskatchewan wherever it went, and in the natural diversion of things they came driving over the broad, unobstructed yellow flood that eddied round the Devil's Elbow.

Black as Stygian craft the canoes loomed in the shadow of the headland, but as they passed the headland the first sapphire shafts of the dawnlight struck them glinting from the canoe sides, flashing from the dipping paddles, paradoxically investing the white and Indian faces with nebulous, pearly halos.

In the sudden blaze of light Carlisle recognized the faces, the men of every craft: James and Roderick McKenzie, McLeod and McDougall with their Athabasca brigades, Todd from Fort des Prairies, McGillivray and Sager from Fond du Lac. The governor's information had been accurate. Not a man he had named was missing.

Todd's canoe was in front, and as it approached the boom, Carlisle saw a man rise to his feet and plant a flagstaff in the curving bow.

The banner of the Northwesters broke on the morning wind, and behind its rippling folds he

beheld Richelieu, stiff as a ramrod in the swaying craft, resplendent in his uniform of a colonel, his grinning black-bearded face hideously pox-pitted, more like the face of the devil than ever!

"Long live the Northwest Company!" he cried, and like an echo his forces took up the Northwest watch-cry: "Fortitude in distress!" their cheering drowning the roaring of the river.

Carlisle stooped to pick up a spike-ended shaft that lay at his feet on the boom. With a strong darting thrust he drove the spike into the logs, and the shaft oscillated there, shaking out the blood-red emblem of the Hudson's Bay Company and Carlisle's own streaming gonfalon, the gonfalon that had come undimmed through fire and flood, through famine and plague, through all the hazards of the Northland.

"*Pro Pelle Cutem!*" he shouted, antagonistically, and the bellow of the Hudson's Bay giants set the high hill-tops quaking.

"Long live the Northwest Company!"

"A skin for a skin!" they boomed in a diapason of terrible strength. "Long live the H. B. C.!"

"By the Doom, yes, and to perdition with Richelieu and his cursed Northwesters!" shrilled a wild voice ashore.

Carlisle glanced over his shoulder to see the tall form of Wayne dashing out upon the boom and behind him Joan, her pale face paler with excitement, her spun-gold hair flying in the breeze, calling him back in vain. Behind Joan ran Andrews, holding the skirts of his cassock,

his mosquito-veil flapping over his face at every stride.

Wayne impetuously zigzagged through the line of men to Carlisle's side. His mahogany countenance was ridged with anger, his fawn-green eyes sparkling wickedly.

"Condemnation! Carlisle," he burst out, "yesterday I never dreamed I would fight under your flag! To-day what is left for me to do? Look at my brigade leaders yonder—one, two, six of them from the Upper Country posts," pointing them out with rapid stabs of his rifle muzzle, "speckled through Richelieu's crew like the pits in his face! And when my brigade leaders paddle in his pay, Carlisle, I ask you where in creation are my brigades?"

"Sleeping under the green ferns, Ralph," Richelieu answered, swiftly, before Carlisle could speak.

"You cursed slime! Who put them there?" flashed Wayne.

Richelieu stiffly shrugged his military shoulders.

"*Diablement*, do I control the elements and the plagues? The Red Death raged, and the Red Death took whom it wished. *Voilà!* It is the will of God. But my quarrel is not with you, Ralph Wayne. *Non*, nor with Mademoiselle Joan. I will have a word to your profit with both of you when I have finished with this *canaille* Carlisle, broken his barrier and razed his post to the ground."

Wayne half lifted his rifle stock to his cheek.

"By the Doom—will you have a word with us?"

Carlisle pressed Wayne's rifle barrel down.

"This is my business, Wayne," he warned the Free-Trader. "Keep your weapons still. Get Joan back to the shore end yonder. She may be carried into the water if they try a rush."

Carlisle half turned to enforce his request on Wayne, for the instant lessening his vigilance, and in that moment of unwariness Richelieu thought to seize the advantage.

"*Hola!*" he shouted, loudly, to his brigades. "Form the line!"

Like lightning the paddles urged, the hindmost canoes drawing up on a level with the foremost, edging in, bellying sidewise, jockeying like race-horses at the barrier, forming an unbroken line from shore to shore. All in a second they executed the manœuvre with two or three darting paddle-flips, and as the prows evened and still glided in swift motion, Richelieu waved them forward.

"Charge!" he ordered, and hurled them on with a violent gesture of his arm as if they had been a squadron in action.

Like charging cavalry the canoes leaped ahead, like immense horses carrying many riders, the foam streaking from their noses, the spray spattering behind them, Richelieu towering in the bow of Todd's craft as on the neck of a charger, leading them recklessly like the fearless soldier he was and whipping them to frenzy with the stinging lash of his tongue.

Straight at the boom they reared, but Carlisle sensed their trick. A canoe's length away, the whole array would swerve broadside on and spill the Northwesters out on the boom with momentum enough to carry all before them and sweep the Hudson's Bay forces into the water.

Richelieu was shrewd enough not to mass his attack in one spot but to batter the whole boom simultaneously. His force was almost equal to Carlisle's and he knew that the swift rush of the canoes would dash his men upon the boom with a smashing impact that no merely stationary force could withstand. It would be like a single line of infantry before galloping horsemen, overridden, crushed, shattered by sheer impetus.

He knew that Carlisle knew it, too, and he passed a quick order along the line.

"Shoot once!" he commanded. "Then jump for their canoes before they reach the boom!"

Yelling demoniacally, the Northwesters were driving in, only a few yards distant. Todd's canoe was surging fairly for Carlisle, Richelieu still upright in the bow, the flapping folds of the flag partly hiding his body but the ugly black-bearded face showing clear above, his mocking eyes gleaming over the barrel of the pistol he held in his hand.

"*Par Dieu!* Carlisle," he grinned. "It is the end of your strife, your company, your dream of mademoiselle!"

Carlisle did not trouble to answer. His own pistol in his hand, he waited, his eyes never shifting from Richelieu, his body slightly bent for-

ward from the hips, his moccasined feet gripping the wet bark of the logs.

When the canoes were still two paddle-strokes away he saw the muzzle of Richelieu's pistol flip upward, caught the puff of smoke, heard the weapon's bark, felt the wind of the silent lead through his hair and its burning groove along his scalp.

Straight into the black-bearded face he fired, but the swaying flagstaff snapped, while Richelieu still grinned there, mockingly, sardonically, sighting his pistol afresh in the rocking craft. But before either he or Carlisle could shoot again, Wayne's long-barrelled rifle spat from the boom.

Faint as a squib it went off at Carlisle's ear in concert with the Hudson's Bay men's volley, but the effect was contrastingly violent. Richelieu, his weapon dropping with a splash, whirled half way round as if spun by an invisible hand. Todd's canoe was just in the act of turning broadside on to the boom, and the jerk catapulted the staggering Richelieu out of the swerving canoe bow.

He landed limply, half in the water, half on the boom. Carlisle had a momentary glance of Andrews dragging his body out on the logs, of Wayne jamming in another charge, of the white-faced Joan beside him as he leaped from the boom before Todd's canoe could touch it.

All along the line the others leaped with him, and they landed with a wallowing splash close under the Northwesters' whirling canoes. The Hudson's Bay men knew the depth of the water,

a knowledge that their enemies lacked, and therein lay their advantage and Carlisle's strategy. The total unexpectedness of the move lent it all the greater force, and the number of Carlisle's officers distributed throughout the line ensured perfect unison of effort.

Galt, Drummond, Lewis, Jarvis, Hampton, Garry, Lea, Missowa, and Waseyawin and the lesser clerks were personally responsible for the men under their command, and they saw to it that all moved in concert.

Thus it was an unbroken row of men that barred an unbroken row of canoes, before the occupants of the canoes could jump from craft to boom, and seized their low-sunk gunwales. The clear-headed Todd smelled disaster the moment the Hudson's Bay men launched through the air.

"Hades! Look out!" he yelled to the other partners. "Back-water, all!"

But Carlisle was too swift for him. A whirl of the Factor's hands and Todd's canoe was upside down, the fur packs on the bottom, Todd and his crew floundering in the water.

Todd came up sputtering and cursing. His rifle-butt smashed down on Carlisle's shoulder, but Carlisle skimmed the surface with a fist blow that caught Todd upon the chin and stretched him limp and floating. Scattering the Indian crew, he lunged on to overturn the nearest craft.

Nor had his men been idle! Everywhere he looked he saw the Northwest canoes either capsized or in the act of being capsized by his men.

Up to their waists, sometimes to their armpits, in the icy water they offered small targets for Northwest violence while the canoes were easy prey.

Often top-heavy with crews and packs of fur, always hair-poised on their keelless bottoms, the birchbarks went over at the touch of a hand, the poke of a knee, or the solid push of a gunbutt.

It was a weird sight to behold, whole brigades suddenly turning turtle, heeling on their gunwales, rearing up on their sterns, spilling and sprawling arms, gear, men, and furs in all directions.

Some of the Hudson's Bay men in their savage zeal paused not for the laying on of hands but struck through the birchbark skins of the canoes with knives and belt axes, scuttling the crafts at a stroke, sending the paddlers under like mannikins in a biscuit box.

Bitter was the amphibious battle through which Carlisle rampaged. Though they had lost their canoes, the Northwesters found their footing and resisted tenaciously. Many of their arms were sunk in the plunge, more they saved were plugged with mud and slime so that there was little shooting.

They fought as their forefathers fought, with knife and club and knotted fist, a primitive horde battling like cavemen in the wilderness, raging in the churned, moiled river between steep benchlands under the blazing sun.

High on those benchlands clustered the

womenkind of the tribes in action, all gay clothed in their calicoes, bright-cowled in their warm-coloured shawls, the squaws, the boys, the maidens, the moss-bagged papooses, even the husky dogs of the camp snarling and clipping their fangs over the conflict in the water below.

In that wild moment the women far forgot their race stoicism and shrilled encouragement to their hunters, waved their gaudy silk handkerchiefs, beseeching their Good Spirit to help the Hudson's Bay men, calling on their Evil One to blast the bold Northwesters.

The hunters answered their cries with strident yells, their wet, swarthy arms glistening like bronze in the sunlight as, led by Missowa and Waseyawin, they carried the fight more fiercely to their foes. The Northwesters were beaten back from the boom they had hoped to break. Carlisle at the head of his men seized McLeod and bodily hurled him out on the farther shore.

"Get the partners!" he shouted above the crazy din. "Smash the other partners and the whole crowd will break!"

"Are ye no seein' I ha' got ane?" rumbled Lewis, sloshing in the water like a hippopotamus.

He had a neck-hold on McGillivray, and even though Sager leaped upon his back he staggered out to the shallows, cast McGillivray into the saskatoon bushes like a discarded sack, and tore Sager off as a man would pluck a climbing cat.

"Ane an' twa!" he amended. "Where are yon ithers?"

"Ba gar! here—dese two!" chuckled Drummond as he and Galt backed the McKenzies out on to the stranded ice-cakes with their hammering gun-butts.

Jarvis was smiting McDougall with his fists, fighting as he had fought many a London street fight in the years that were gone. He struck the Northwester at will upon the face and neck, all that showed above the rippling surface, but without warning McDougall drove his knee under water into Jarvis's stomach and Jarvis staggered violently back against the boom.

McDougall turned and madly splashed ashore, while Jarvis gazed after him with a surprise and agony on his Cockney face.

"Stryke me blind in the blinkers! That's a foul, I s'y!" he gasped, and promptly collapsed across the logs.

Up-river a tremendous shout burst out. Carlisle wheeled waist deep, and a triumphant laugh broke from him.

"Wells is coming!" he encouraged his men. "Now, all together! Give them blue perdition!"

Wells's fleet was swinging round the Devil's Elbow at a dizzy speed, the canoes boring forward in long jumps, throwing the water aside in rolling ridges, the paddles making the surface boil. They cheered as they came, all the loud-throated men of the Seepanock Channel, all the river scouts he had picked up on his way down.

"Skin for skin!" they roared to their battling fellows, and the immersed warriors found breath to answer back.

"Long live the H. B. C.!"

Fresh and strong and numerous Wells's force struck the Northwesters in the back, and under the pressure of his advance they scattered for the shore like a herd of caribou to join their beaten leaders. Heading the rout, Carlisle saw a bedraggled figure he recognized, the hawk-nosed Dentaire with his moustache plastered over his cheeks.

"By Jove! there he is!" Carlisle cried. "Look, Eugene. Look, Galt. Dentaire—you remember? Did you ever know the like of that? Ready to die of fear of smallpox and never got it!"

Dentaire heard Carlisle's laugh and took it for an imputation on his bravery.

"*Bon Dieu!* can we fight enemies with our backs as well as our fronts? Also, it is of a circumstance condemnable that our leaders run away. It's all over with us!"

He gesticulated frantically while all the other partners cursed him as they drew out the injured Todd and many more before they broke and clawed a way up over the benchland and off through the park lands.

"Missowa! Waseyawin!" Carlisle ordered. "Take the Indian hunters and trail them well clear of the river. Without canoes or many arms they'll have to beat a way south to the Assiniboine trails, so don't bother them any further than to see that they keep moving. Lewis, take Jarvis and the rest of the hurt men up to the post."

"You, Galt, have Spotted Deer get ready to

take my dispatch to James Bay and then get plenty of men to pry out that jam in the chasm. This place ought to drain by night, and we'll pick the fur packs and gear off the dry bottom. And you, Eugene, look after the canoes and salvage what you can."

Amid fresh, joyful shrieks from their squaws, the hunters scrambled away on their mission, and Lewis and Galt set about their respective tasks, while Carlisle waded back to the boom with Eugene.

Since the struggle began, he had had no opportunity even to glance aside to where he had left the others, but now he saw them in the same spot. Andrews bent over the prostrate Richelieu lying on the logs, Wayne standing beside with his rifle-butt grounded and Joan beckoning with anxious hands.

"*Diable!*" exclaimed Eugene. "W'at she be want now? W'at's wrong dere? I ain't be see any wan."

"It's Richelieu," deduced Carlisle. "He must be badly hurt. Go on and attend to the canoes, Eugene, before they get smashed up with floating ice."

He lunged ahead where Todd's canoe with Richelieu's broken flagstaff in the bow lay half crushed against the boom and drew himself up dripping on the logs.

"What's the matter, Joan?" he asked. "Is he badly wounded?"

"Andrews says he's going to die," she told him. "And he wants you. Hurry up!"

"Here, Paul," begged Andrews, "stand over where he can see you."

Carlisle stepped over with Joan to where her father leaned on his rifle by Richelieu's side. The Northwester lay in the groove between two of the three rows of logs in the triple boom, his shoulders supported by Andrews. At first glance Carlisle noted where Wayne's bullet had pierced his uniform high and to the left of the middle of his breast.

There was little blood staining it above, but underneath the bark was red, and his breathing came in long, irregular gasps. His black-bearded face was sombre with an unearthly sombreness on account of the pallor of the skin wherein the sunken pox-pits showed a bluish tinge. His eyelids lay shut, but at Andrews' whisper he opened them and stared weakly up into Carlisle's wondering face.

"*Dieu!*" he murmured, his eyes turning to Andrews. "It is my last breath, and it is good that it goes into confession, Father. I have lived in sin. That goes without saying. But I will not sink eternally into hell. *Oui*, and that is why I make confession openly and to all."

He paused, breathing heavily, while his eyes went back to Carlisle, to Joan, and then to Wayne.

"It was I, Wayne," he confessed with electrifying unexpectedness. "That day, in the Wyoming Valley—that old day of Butler's Raid! *Mon Dieu!* you knew I loved her, but you did not know how much. I was young. I was a lieutenant.

I was mad. In the panic of the raid I thought to make her ride away with me, but she was true. *Ciel!* yes, she was true, and I——”

He stopped, and Wayne gazed at him as a man of stone, an inanimate thing that cannot comprehend. Then, sudden as his wrath, the full import of Richelieu's words flashed upon him, and he changed from a man of stone to a livid, quivering demon. Often as Carlisle had seen him in anger, he had never seen anything like the light that instantly fused his fawn-green eyes to incandescence.

It was as if all the fires of hell suddenly struck them and were glanced back. He opened his mouth, but not a word came forth. Then with an animal-like snarl he raised his rifle like a giant pestle in both hands, the butt poising over Richelieu's head as if to stamp out some vermin or reptile, some monstrous abortion that he had glimpsed in all its vileness.

Carlisle and Joan threw themselves upon him from either hand, Carlisle's grip locking his arms to his side. He raged like a fiend, but the Factor's great strength held him back, their bodies swaying from side to side on the logs, and as they swayed Richelieu began to speak again.

“*Voilà!* And then I lied. I took you, Wayne, and told my story but named another man. I hated him. *Oui*, you do not know how I hated then, in my youth. I hated Charlie Carlisle for I knew he loved her, too. So I laid my wrong upon him because he could not deny. *Comment?* No, he could not deny, wounded and drunk as he

was. They were all drunk that day, and he knew not whether he fought man, woman, or child, one or one thousand of them."

"My God!" breathed Carlisle, swift anger overwhelming the vibrant thrill that Richelieu's first words had sent pulsing through him. "You did that?"

He loosed his grip from Wayne, and oddly enough the surge of wrath in Carlisle left Wayne quiescent. He was a man of stone once more with one hand pressing on his rifle-barrel, the other hand passed around Joan's waist.

Carlisle leaned over Richelieu, his face contorted with mingled emotion, righteous indignation, horror, disgust, suspense.

"My God, man—you did that?" he repeated.

"*Oui*," and the head nodded feebly, "but I knew his life would not be worth a franc while Wayne knew he was alive, and I had blood enough on my hands. So I smuggled him away till the heat of the day had died out of him, and then I told him what he had done."

"You incarnate fiend!" choked Carlisle, for into his mind rose the vision of his father as he had known him—tall, straight, handsome, the pride of his boyish eyes in the dashing uniform of a captain of the Rangers.

"Just so! He knew he would not have his life long if he stayed. And who could face his friends or his own flesh with that stain upon him? He disappeared, and one day a priest came into the post of Niagara to care for his boy."

"Who, pray?"

"Father Andrews here!"

Carlisle leaned lower, his face abruptly charged with red blood.

"And he lived—lives yet?" he demanded.

"Why not? I have lived—till now. Wayne lives. Why not Charlie Carlisle? Take my word for it. If you don't take my word for it, ask Father Andrews here. Charlie Carlisle paid him to keep his secret and to raise you, and he knows. But be quick. I am weakening fast, and Andrews must give me absolution."

"Andrews—Andrews!" cried Carlisle, torn with emotion. "My father's alive?"

"Yes, Paul—yes."

"You know where he is?"

"Yes."

"And you'll take me to him now—I mean, soon, without delay?"

"Yes, soon," promised Andrews. "When we go down to Grande Portage I'll take you to him. Now go, quickly. Don't you see Richelieu's at his last breath?"

Andrews bent over Richelieu to give him final absolution, and Carlisle, with his heart in a tumult and his face alight, turned away to Wayne and Joan. Joan's eyes were shining into his through a film of moisture, but Wayne still stood like an image staring stonily at the strange confessional. Then he raised his eyes to Carlisle's and put out his gnarled hand.

"Richelieu isn't the only one who wronged you, Carlisle!" he exclaimed with a depth of feeling that shook his chest. "I've put a ter-

rible wrong on you—on both you and your father.”

“But, Wayne, you can make it right,” smiled Carlisle, clasping the gnarled fist with one hand and significantly taking Joan’s soft palm with the other. “All in a minute you can make it right.”

Wayne looked from one to the other, and an ancient tenderness, a memory of vanished years, seemed to creep into his stony mahogany face. His mask broke suddenly, and the tears ran down his cheeks.

“By the Doom, Carlisle,” he muttered, laying his hands upon their shoulders, “I make it right.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN THE TEMPLE OF THE WILD

"GRANDE PORTAGE at last, father!" exclaimed Joan, using words she had used a full year before as the Factor's craft grazed the Port Charlotte landing on the Pigeon River's bank. "It is good to get the canoe cramps out."

"Yes, Joan," nodded Wayne, a smile cracking the grim mahogany of his face as recollection stirred within him. "It's been a long day, but here's a nine-mile walk to stretch your legs."

"And not a packer to clutter up the trail!" laughed Carlisle, giving Joan his hand to help her out. "Look at Port Charlotte—empty as a last year's bird's nest! Look at the Portage—deserted to the skyline! We'll have a quick passage over."

Twelve months before he had gone into Cumberland House with a lone canoe. Now he had come out down the Saskatchewan, Lake Winnipeg, through the Winnipeg River, the Lake of the Woods, Rainy Lake, and the Pigeon River with a fleet of fifteen hundred paddles. As he turned off up the trail with Joan, followed by Wayne and Andrews, he waved a sign to his brigade leader, Drummond, to unload the massed brigades and pack over after him.

Side by side in the warm glow of the July evening he and Joan climbed up over the three miles of gentle convolutions that terraced the way to the loftiest ridge before they looked back, and when they glanced around they beheld an unbroken line of pack-laden men crawling upward with the slow, peculiar, bobbing motion that packs in the tump-line impart.

The sight brought home more clearly to Joan the memory of that other evening when Carlisle and Andrews had come over the Portage with their warning, and she began to laugh softly in low, throaty notes that blended with songs of the thrushes by the trailside.

"Do you remember, Paul, how you came to tell us the Portage was closed? You were a Northwest mail-courier in black cotton shirt, mackinaw trousers, cowhide moccasins, and a battered, blue felt hat. Yes, and your face was stained as brown as an Indian's. Do you remember?"

"Yes," nodded Carlisle, "I remember that masquerade, all right, and I remember how I cursed it when you came."

"Why?" she teased, "because it was so dirty?"

"No, you cherished hypocrite, because I wanted you to know me as I was. I wanted to stand in the skin God gave me."

"Conceited thing!" Joan bantered. "As if that amounted to much! And as if I cared at all!"

She fluted out her laughter freely as she darted

down the Grande Portage slope of the trail, away from the reach of his impulsive arm. Graceful as a fawn she ran, breaking into song in the sheer joy of her surroundings and inner being, and Carlisle, his heart singing, too, in anticipation of the union and the reunion that was to be, sprang lightly after.

They swish-swished in their moccasins across the corduroy paths of the beaver meadows, over the small, bridged creeks, down the hundred-foot gulches that dropped like steps toward Lake Superior. Through the patches of poplar and birch and the heart of the grand pinery they descended, now slowly to a walk, now quickening to a run, till they traversed the last mile of the long slope and came out into the clearing close to the Northwest post.

As at Port Charlotte and along the whole length of the Portage, there was not a man to be seen. Yet men had been here not long before, for in the canoe harbour the recovered fur sloop *Otter* and many big Rabiscaw canoes from Montreal were tied, and upon the curving sand beach burned the evening fires of the canoemen.

Breathing themselves while they waited for the others, Carlisle and Joan stared at the scene before them with the sympathetic eyes of children blooded to the wild. Afar surged the vast green expanse of Lake Superior gilded with the molten wash of gold spilled over the high, wooded mainland ridge where the Pigeon River brawled down to its rest on the mighty bosom, scrolled with its white-crested waves.

Nearer at hand spread the channel, a mile and one quarter wide, screened by the tree-crowned island that almost yielded to the primeval embrace of the mainland. As they had seen it a year before, so they saw it now, the sheltering island with its rubble of great, gnarled boulders littering the beach, its long, sloping point sheer-ing up and its rampart of bush standing solid above.

Their eyes followed the amphitheatre of the bay, a crescent sweep of shallow water, delicate green in colour and clear as air, edged by a low, flat shore that was backed in turn by terraced Laurentian hills.

Tier upon tier the hills rose as of old, the lowest three hundred feet in height, the highest more than one thousand, covered with crowding forest of birch and spruce and pine thrusting out virgin arms to embrace the lesser island. Yonder was the natural barrier, the forty-foot cliff of rock walling the back of the level shoreland and curving westward into the lake. Not a tree nor a stone was changed or gone!

Along the eastern side foamed the small stream in unvaried volume, and there, without addition or diminution, the post buildings crouched behind their eighteen-foot cedar palings with the gate fast closed, while the same tent villages and teepees and cabins dotted the eastern bank of the stream with the same cattle grazing on the meadows and terraces farther back.

In the midst of their silent gazing they heard

the feet of Wayne and Andrews and the packers behind, and with one accord they moved on along the path that led to the closed gate of the post.

Eighteen feet in the air Thompson's quizzical Welsh face peered down at them over the top of the palisades.

"By St. John, Carlisle!" he greeted. "Art here, then? Had word of 'ee. Hast come in peace or in war?"

"In peace, Davvy, old friend," laughed Carlisle. "There's no need to trouble you. Open the gate."

"Ha! Is good news," grinned Davvy. "Wouldst not want tuh slaying of all with my own hands. Am all alone here."

Joan, Carlisle, and the rest burst into hearty laughter as Thompson's head disappeared from the palisades to reappear a moment later in the open entrance.

"That was a bold front you put on for a solitary man, Davvy," chaffed Carlisle, shaking his hand prodigiously. "I wondered why Port Charlotte and the Portage were deserted."

"Word of thy doings came down tuh waterways," Thompson explained, "and not a man wouldst stay. The Eastern partners wouldst not come past tuh Kaministiquia, and tuh Indians and tuh Montreal paddlers here took to tuh bush."

"They don't need to be alarmed," Carlisle assured him. "All we want is a peaceful passage. You see, Davvy, the Hudson's Bay

Company has smashed the Northwesters to pieces in the hinterland, and the absorption of the pieces will not be long delayed. Amalgamation is coming, old friend, and you yourself will be back with us again."

"By St. John! Dost say so, old roamer? Wilt not grieve me any if canst keep clear of Colen. Hast loved thee like a brother, Carlisle, and wilt go with a good heart if tuh Hudson's Bay takes tuh Northwest Company over. Wilt be no trade this summer anyway, so wast thinking of going West to hew a new pass over tuh Rockies."

"Then you'll hew it for the Hudson's Bay Company in the end, Davvy."

Thompson shrugged his shoulders.

"What matter, Carlisle? Tuh land is bigger than any institution, is greater than its furs. Wilt be an empire in tuh end of all. And thou? Art going to James Bay?"

"Yes, Davvy."

"Art stopping tuh night here?"

"No, we'll travel the lake when the breeze dies down. To-morrow we may have to lie up wind-bound on the shore. Will you give Miss Wayne and Father Andrews the use of your post for a few minutes? She wants to put on another dress, and Andrews a new cassock."

"Wilt give me pleasure," agreed Thompson, saluting Joan and the others gravely. "But what is tuh purpose?"

"Davvy," smiled Carlisle, "the last time I was here as a mail-courier I had a hand in saving

a certain young lady from being carried off against her will. Now she's being carried off with her own consent."

Thompson's eyes opened wide, his face creased in a grin of remembrance and comprehension, and he suddenly extended his hand to the girl.

"Ha! Is that, then? Wilt congratulate you, Miss Wayne. Yon dirty courier is lucky man. Art most beautiful woman hast ever seen. Come in. Wilt give 'ee my own house for tuh purpose, you and tuh priest."

He led Joan and Andrews inside, while Carlisle and Wayne passed on to the beach where the first packers were letting down the canoes and fur bales, and more and more were arriving every minute in the gathering dusk and slipping their tump-lines to the ground.

Carlisle knew such a freight of fur throughout the whole history of the fur trade had never come over the Grande Portage in a single season. Not only the vast catch of the Hudson's Bay Company was in transit but also the large take of the Northwest Company which he had captured from Richelieu, the McKenzies, Todd, McLeod, McDougall, McGillivray, and Sager in the Devil's Elbow.

Their yearly turnover, greater than any other turnover known in America, had turned to his hands, and it would continue so to turn. Vast as had been the institution of the Northwesters, it was, like the trust of the Free-Traders, shaken to its foundations by a combination of organized warfare and Divine visitation.

The Montreal brigades of rivermen were here, slinking in the woods, but this year the Northmen from the Pays d'en Haut would not gather to meet them.

Grande Portage was an open road, not a private gateway to the West, and though it would be used for some time by his company as an entrepôt for inland business and as an outlet on Superior, Carlisle saw in his mind's eye a changing of the routes by which the fur would all flow to Hudson's Bay instead of to Montreal.

He pictured the dwindling of the Grande Portage, the spot where the brains of the Northwest Company had been situated though its nominal headquarters posed in Beaver Hall, the spot from which the ruthless power of the organization was distributed in stupendous ramifications, like electric energy from a distant waterfall. And in the end he saw the post dismantled, its foundations buried in the sand and scrub, the Portage unused, the Western highway forgotten!

Something of the same thought was running through Wayne's mind as he watched the packing down and the relaunching and reloading of the canoes, and Carlisle, turning to speak to him, caught it in his eye.

"You see it, too, Wayne?" he ventured. "You see the glory departing from this place?"

"Yes, it's sure to go down now," prophesied Wayne, his eyes fixed seer-like, "and the first wagon road linking up the East and the West will carve its epitaph."

"Sometimes I see a road of my own," Carlisle confided, "from the Pays d'en Haut to Hudson's Bay. Yes, and sometimes I even see the shoals of the bay gouged out and a regular fleet of ships sailing there. It's going to be as Thompson says, a country bigger than any individual, bigger than any institution, an empire in the end. Furthermore, it's going to be an empire no man can be ashamed of, Wayne. Why not have a hand in its making?"

Wayne shook his head, disconsolately.

"No, I'm going back when we reach Michipicoten, back to the Wyoming Valley. It was unrest drove me out, Carlisle. It's rest, content, that's taking me home."

"But you'll come sometimes, come to see her?"

"Every year in the spring—when the wanderlust stirs! During the months I won't see her I tell you I'll be very lonely, Carlisle. But don't let her know that. Never a word. Look out—here she comes!"

She was coming out of the post with Thompson and Andrews and time was suddenly telescoped for Carlisle. He beheld her as he had first beheld her that evening she had stepped out of her father's canoe at Port Charlotte, and as he gazed at her he had the mystic feeling that this was that very moment. There had been no long, hard, danger-ridden months, no bitter blood feud, no deadly rivalry between.

Here glided her swelling-hipped, full-bosomed figure, erect, agile, supple in poise, with the graceful strength in the curves of the limbs, as it had

first glided into his consciousness. Here shimmered her radiant hair, yellow, wheaten, spun-gold all in one, like the mingling hues of the birchen leaves in autumn, framing the laughing-eyed, crimson-sprayed, red-lipped face.

Only, she wore the clinging champagne-coloured dress of silk that she had worn at Andrews' first open-air service on the shores of Pine Island Lake, the snow-white doeskin half-moccasins peeping from underneath, the single jewel at her throat.

Carlisle caught his breath deeply as he walked out with Wayne upon the shoreway of the canoe pier, his ermine canoe-robe over his shoulder. On the eastern or harbour arm of the cribwork that extended but halfway back to land he spread the robe for Joan's feet and stood upon it with her, Wayne at their side, Andrews in front.

In the crystal-clear water of the canoe harbour at their feet floated his huge six-fathom craft with the Hudson's Bay Company's crimson flag in the bow, his own streaming gonfalon in the stern. His tried crew were poised in their places, Waseyawin in the bow, Missowa in the stern, the two middlemen paired forward, the two others paired aft, their paddle shafts decorated with the gaudy woollen streamers; their bright-beaded moccasins, gay leggings, flaming belts and scarfs flashing many hues; their black-haired, fillet-bound heads carrying the long, graceful, slanting, violent-coloured plumes that proclaimed them Factor's canoemen.

Close beside nosed the canoes of the officers—

Galt, Drummond, Lewis, Garry, Lea, Jarvis, Hampton, Wells—while behind them the massed brigades covered the entire canoe harbour, the blood-red stars burning upon their warm yellow bows like the fires upon the beach.

Alone by the fires stood Thompson, sole guest of the Northwest Company, till presently the Montreal brigades lurking in the woods on either hand took heart to emerge. They had marked the Hudson's Bay Company's fleet all afloat, marked how things were shaping on the pier, and crept out, 350 of them, to gather silently around on the sandy flat—the giant Pork Eaters, French voyageurs off the Ottawa River and the parishes around, Iroquois Indians, Caughnawaga Indians, the famed rivermen of the Rabiscaws.

A tamed, voiceless host they gathered, for this season their carnival among the Northmen would not ring, their carousal would not rage with their songs and their *boissons* and their deviltry, and for them the code of the law was written farther than the Sault.

They stared in wonder while the same priest they had seen in Grande Portage the year before raised his voice from the rude altar of the canoe pier in the spruce-walled, starry-naved temple of the wild.

"On the winds of the wilderness and to you dwellers in the wilderness," he declaimed, "I publish the banns!"

Sonorously Andrews' voice sounded as he went on to complete the ceremony, and, even as he finished, the shade of Bertand the Montreal mail-

courier seemed to rise from the depths of Grande Portage Bay.

There came the snoring surge of waters swiftly cloven, a triumphant yell out of the lakeward dark, the thump of a quickly wielded paddle upon a canoe gunwale, and the next instant a lone birchbark craft tore through the water-gate of the pier and spilled its lone occupant on the cribwork at their feet.

"Spotted Deer!" exclaimed Carlisle, recognizing the Cree dispatch-bearer he had sent down to James Bay by the Hayes with the report of victory for the governor.

"Ae," replied Spotted Deer, "with the sun and the stars I have paddled to meet you here."

He held out a dispatch that bore the governor's seal.

Hastily Carlisle broke it open and glanced it over in the red flare that the camp-fires sent across the water. His hand shook a little as he passed it on to Andrews.

"Read it out, Andrews," he begged. "It concerns them all as well as me."

Andrews read aloud:

I was overjoyed to get the news of the Northwesters' defeat. Its consequences will be far-reaching indeed. It means no less than the conserving of our charter till such time as we see fit to surrender it. It means the founding of a Western empire which we shall pioneer.

Words cannot express my delight and my satisfaction at the trust I had in you, and I want to record that trust in a more material way. As I wrote you, the James Bay climate has been hard on me. The doctor here at York Factory says I have no option but to leave.

So I must sail on the London fur vessel this summer. I shall carry my resignation with me, and you I have appointed temporary governor in my stead till I reach England and have the London Committee ratify the appointment. Any appointments you may think due those under you I shall also slate accordingly, as one of my last acts before giving up the governorship.

Spotted Deer speaks of a rumour that runs hinting of another honour you will win. My sincerest congratulations and the hope to see you both soon! I am arranging a grand reception for you when you reach James Bay.

"Paul—Paul!" breathed Joan, tensely, while Carlisle, his eyes shining into hers, mutely pressed her hands.

"You dwellers in the wilderness, I introduce Governor Carlisle and his wife!" announced Andrews, handing the dispatch back and stepping aside.

From the massed brigades a vociferous cheer thundered out, and simultaneously the fifteen hundred paddles poised in perpendicular salute, the crimson firelight flashing from the blades.

Carlisle acknowledged the salute with upraised hand and began to speak in resonant tones fraught with deep emotion.

"Men of the Hudson's Bay, I take the governor at his word. You have earned more than any men may get in this world, but this much at least may be yours. To Galt, Lewis, Lea, Garry, Hampton, Jarvis, and Wells I give the permanent Factorships, of Cumberland House, the Pas, the Nepowin, Moose Lake, Chimawawin, Grand Rapids, and the Carrot River.

"Waseyawin, Missowa, and their middlemen

are no longer Factor's crew. They are Governor's crew, and to the middlemen I add Smoking Pine and Spotted Deer. And you, Drummond, I make chief Brigade Leader of all the Hudson's Bay Company's brigades."

A second time the vociferous cheer thundered out, the generous-hearted tribute of the brigade men to these honoured officers, and the officers in grim pride acknowledged the tribute—all but Eugene Drummond.

His *diable* mystery was dissolving at last, and, unthinking of his high appointment, his volatile face worked, his milk-white teeth gleamed, his thin nostrils quivered, his coal-black eyes danced as he stared at Andrews on the pier loosing the cord to drop his brand-new cassock and pull away the mosquito veil.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Eugene, gesticulating with outstretched finger and streaming his raven hair this way and that with nervous head jerks. "*Mon Dieu!*—look dere!"

Carlisle, Joan, and Wayne wheeled swiftly, but Andrews was not there.

By the discarded cassock and mosquito veil stood a tall, straight, handsome, gray-haired, grave-faced stranger in the ancient but dashing uniform of Butler's Rangers.

"By the Doom—Captain Charles Carlisle!" identified Wayne.

THE END



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